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THE
PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

BY MARK HOPE



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THE
PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

A Story of Female Prison Life

BY
MARK HOPE

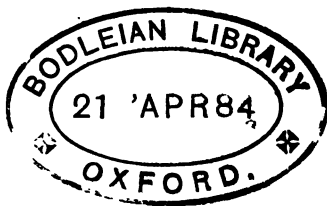
•
" Mine enemies are lively, and they are strong ; and they that hate me wrongfully
are multiplied."

" Forsake me not, O Lord : O my God, be not far from me." ;
(PSALM XXXVIII. 19, 21.)

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THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES THE REV. MICHAEL CHRISTY AND THE
REV. JEREMY JABBOT.

THE chaplaincy of the County Prison at Tolminster was vacant.

The place was worth £300 a year, with residence, firing, &c., and, as usual, there were numerous applicants. Notices were inserted in the local papers requesting candidates to send in their testimonials within a given time to the clerk of the peace; and at the Michaelmas Quarter Sessions the justices, having disposed of other county business, made their election.

The chairman, an old nobleman deeply versed in the guile of this world, had promised his vote to the canvassers of a candidate whom he had never seen or heard of before, but he had omitted to promise his interest at the same time. The consequence was that the pushing gentleman polled but half a dozen votes, as against thirty awarded to a competitor, whose only canvassers had been a remarkably good set of testimonials.

The Rev. Michael Christy was his name; he was a graduate of St. John's College, Oxford, twenty-eight years old, unmarried. His experience had hitherto lain in the crowded parish of a large manufacturing city, and he was said to have done wonders in humanizing a population who were habitual frequenters of gaols and gin-shops. He was described as gentle, genial, zealous; a perfect gentleman, and a devoutly pious Christian; if he had a fault, wrote his late rector, it was that his excellent heart rendered him too liable to be imposed upon by designing hypocrites, but of such a failing as this prison work would, without any doubt, soon break him.

Mr. Christy was introduced to receive notification of his appointment, and created a favourable impression on the magisterial minds. He was of the class who order themselves lowly and reverently

before their betters, and when the noble chairman addressed him a little set speech of congratulation, he was wise enough to attempt no reply, but merely bowed with respect. His stature was rather above the middle height, his hair very fair and wavy, his forehead high and arching. He had clear blue eyes, small light whiskers, a fresh complexion, and an air of being sweet-tempered, which rendered his countenance highly prepossessing; whilst his erect carriage and broad shoulders spoke to a muscular strength which must have been developed by plenty of athletic exercise.

One of the younger magistrates, who had been at Christ Church, suddenly remembered that there was a Christy of John's, who used to hit splendidly to leg; wherefore, as the justices filed out of the meeting-room to enter the courts where the grand jury had been charged in the earlier part of the day, and where the prisoners were now going to be tried, he accosted the new chaplain, saying:

"Surely we have met before at Oxford? Didn't you play at Lord's for the 'Varsity?"

"Yes," answered Michael, smiling; "but it seems to me ever so long ago now."

"Oh, I remember you perfectly; and wasn't there another Christy related to you, at Merton, I think?"

"Yes, my elder brother; he is in the 12th Dragoons now."

"Ah, that's it; I met him lately at Brighton, where his regiment is lying, and a capital fellow he is. Didn't I hear him say you belonged to the Lincolnshire Christys?"

"Yes, my father, the vicar of Asham, was brother to Sir Wemyss of Oakleigh, and as Sir Wemyss has only a daughter, my brother Frank is heir-presumptive to the entailed estates."

"To be sure—to be sure; well, I'm glad to find we're almost old friends, for my father and Sir Wemyss Christy are great chums. They have sat side by side in parliament for years. My name is Armstrong, and you and I shall see a good deal of each other, for I am one of the visiting justices of the prison. Of course you dine with us all to-night at the 'Crown'? Good-bye for the present."

Mr. Hugh Armstrong, who was a fox-hunting, pheasant-shooting squire, with a tawny moustache and very polite manners, went nodding into court to take his seat on the bench, and Michael Christy descended the staircase crowded with a throng of lawyers, witnesses, and policemen. The prisoners' van had just arrived from the gaol, and as the chaplain emerged from the Shire Hall he was obliged to pause on the steps owing to an obstruction caused by a crowd of boys and street loafers, who had assembled to jeer at the prisoners as they descended from the cellular vehicle, and

passed through a postern into the ward of detention below the court-house.

It was a painful sight, and roused in Michael Christy a moment of emotion. He even hesitated as to whether he ought not to return into the court to watch the trials of these wretched men and women who were soon to be under his spiritual charge, in order that he might become acquainted with their characters by hearing what was deposed concerning them, and, if possible, speak to them a word of comfort immediately after their sentences. But he reflected that it was better he should judge the prisoners for himself, than run the risk of being prejudiced against them by the harangues of prosecuting counsel and the accusations of vindictive witnesses; and as to comfort, thought he, perhaps solitude and reflection are the best companions of a man whom the law has just struck. So with a sigh he crossed the sunny market-place and bent his steps towards his new home, whose massive gray fabric he had espied from the train as he came into Tolminster that morning.

The County Prison of Eastshire was a new model gaol outwardly resembling an ancient fortress. It was built of graystone and flint, and stood on an eminence about a quarter of a mile outside the boundaries of the old assize town, from every part of whose crooked High Street it could be seen; ponderous and gloomy when the sky was overcast, stately and picturesque on nights when the moon was up, and it seemed to bristle like a watchful castle guarding the sleeping borough.

A broad gravel sweep extended outside, and the central tower of the façade was flanked by a couple of pointed minarets; its huge black door being surmounted by a sham portcullis with spikes. On either side of this entrance, which never opened but to admit carriages containing prisoners (the vehicles of ordinary visitors remaining on the gravel sweep), stood two private residences, which completed the frontage: that to the right, facing you, was the governor's; to the left, the chaplain's. Each had a strip of garden in front, a flight of steps, and a rustic wooden portico overgrown with wild roses, clematis, and hollyhocks. There was also a wooden balconette in every window for the reception of flowers. These rustic things had been ingeniously contrived by the architect, for porticoes and balconies of stone would have been out of keeping with the mediæval design of the building, whereas porches and frames of fir-wood, with the bark still on them, looked like natural modern adaptations to a very old structure. Although it was late in the season the windows and garden of the governor's house were still a-bloom with geranium and mignonette, and a few white roses still hung over the door,

littering the steps with their fresh petals. Michael Christy observed that it was not so with the chaplain's residence; but he had yet to learn that his predecessor, Mr. Jabbot, was not a florist nor a cultivator of the graces in any other way.

A maid-servant showed him into the study of this ruddy and burly divine, who stood in his shirt-sleeves heaping books into a packing-case. He was hot, dusty, and querulous, complaining incoherently of persons who prevented him from doing what he wanted to do. He apologized for not having been at the Shire Hall to do the honours to Mr. Christy—of whose election he had just heard from a warder—but how could a man be expected to have his wits about him when he had such a wife as Mrs. Jabbot, who had gone off to Margate with the children, leaving him to pay the tradesmen and do all the packing? No man had ever been so harassed as he; he had found no time to visit a prisoner for the last fortnight, and it would be the saddest day of his life when he turned his back upon Tolminster for good and all. Meanwhile, would Mr. Christy take a glass of sherry?

With the natural respectfulness of young clergymen in the presence of their elders, Michael Christy hearkened to Mr. Jabbot's grievances sympathetically, and he volunteered to take off his coat on the spot, to help him pack the books; but it appeared that Mr. Jabbot was overjoyed at the opportunity to let the books take care of themselves, for he rang to order some sherry, and subsided into an arm-chair near the fire, motioning his successor to take the opposite seat. The fire was choked up by heaps of charred papers, and Mr. Jabbot stirred it, complaining of the badness of the coals. He had been out that day and found the wind cold; when the sherry came up he cautioned the new chaplain against the wine-merchant who had sold it him; and thence he started into a lamentable, rambling account of the deceptions he had met with in this wretched prison to which he had been attached ten years.

He was leaving now, consequently upon having obtained a comfortable living in the next county, and if he could only have got preferment before he would have gone long ago. Captain Keyser, the governor, was a man with whom it was impossible to get on: nobody could brook his arrogance and wilful discourtesy. The doctor was no better—and an atheist besides—and the two played into each other's hands. Visiting justices meant well, but they could not keep their eyes upon all that went on in the prison, and if they only knew the half of what he—Mr. Jabbot—knew, there would be a rumpus. One must have lived in a prison to know what things could be done there by men who enjoyed public confidence;

as for himself, he retained his *mens conscia recti*, and washed his hands of everything and everybody.

Then Mr. Jabbot drank a second glass of sherry, and came to the prisoners.

Certainly there were good prisoners and bad; but he had only a limited faith in the reclaiming of men who had the gaol taint on them. He had seen too much of that kind of thing tried: it was like essaying to make rotten apples sound again. As a general rule, he would lay down that the prisoners who seemed to be the best were the worst, and *vice versa*. If he had had his way he might have done some good, but he was balked at every step, and he had long ago come to look upon a prison chaplain's functions as a mere mockery. In these big county gaols the chaplain was tolerated for the form of the thing, but every man's hand was against him; and what little good he might effect must be carried through in the teeth of systematic opposition.

Michael Christy was dismayed. He had solicited his new post with the conviction that he would find so much good to do, and be warmly seconded in attempting it. That he would have to encounter opposition he knew, but he had expected it would come from the prisoners themselves in his attempt to struggle with their hardened natures, and was by no means prepared for hindrance, or even for so much as lukewarmness in support, at the hands of the authorities.

However, it was only for an instant that the new chaplain's brain reeled under the shock of Mr. Jabbot's assault. His good sense came to the rescue, and showed him in the elder clergyman a man who from some causes or other had become soured. From the moment that he detected a system in the indiscriminate jeremiads of his predecessor he hearkened, civilly indeed, but without interest, and troubled by a helpless feeling that he was wasting his time.

The clock struck six while the ministers were still together; and as both were invited to the justices' dinner, which was appointed for seven o'clock at the Crown Hotel, Mr. Jabbot gave a start, bemoaning the fact that time was always taking him at a disadvantage. He had intended to get a bed-room ready for his new friend, but hoped the latter would not mind sleeping at the "Crown" just for one night, seeing that all the rooms upstairs were in utter confusion, thanks to Mrs. Jabbot. He had a great deal more to say, but would find a spare hour for it to-morrow, when he would take his successor round the prison, and make over to him all the books of his department. He had some private notes too, of course—for a chaplain was required to take notes—but he had not troubled himself overmuch in this particular, for there was no

relying on what prisoners said of themselves, and what others said of them could be easily remembered without noting.

"I should be glad, though, to read your observations on any cases of special interest," remarked the new chaplain wistfully.

"Yes, yes, to be sure," said Mr. Jabbot, putting on his coat, for he had sat all the afternoon in his shirt-sleeves. "But when you have been here as long as I have (if you *should* remain so long, which, for your sake, I hope you won't,) you'll find that interesting cases are a delusion. It's always the same old story of temptation, drink, or seduction, and recklessness. The prisoners abuse their friends who brought them up badly: the women cry, and the men snivel. If there's a murderer, he takes to his Bible, and hopes he shall be recommended to mercy."

"I believe there *is* a man committed for murder in this county?" said Michael, who was growing somewhat disgusted.

"Yes; he'll be tried at the next assizes: but it is a very ordinary affair—a poaching affray with keepers. The poor wretch will be hanged, and serve him right. Then there's a case of attempted murder: that woman, Margaret Field, who tried to kill the beautiful Miss Graham, Colonel Forester's betrothed"

"I read the report in the papers," said Michael. "Didn't she waylay Miss Graham at a blacksmith's forge, and strike her in the face with a pair of white-hot tongs?"

"Yes, and blinded her," replied Mr. Jabbot, who stood for a moment as if perplexed. "To tell you the truth, Christy, that *is* an exceptional case. The woman seems to have received some education, but she behaves like a fiend. The first time I visited her she spat in my face."

"How long has she been awaiting trial?"

"Three months, and she may have to wait four months longer; but she has rather grown worse than improved since she came here. Such a fury of invective, such stubborn callousness and diabolical malice, I never witnessed before. My good friend, I almost believe that woman is possessed of a devil."

"Out of Mary Magdalene were cast seven devils," thought Michael Christy; but he kept the reflection to himself.

It was dinner-time, and the two went out together, Mr. Jabbot complaining of his shirt collar which had too much starch.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPEL SERVICE IN A MODEL GAOL.

THE dinner at the Crown Hotel was attended by about thirty magistrates, the leading barristers of the circuit, and some local worthies. It was a merry affair for people who have sat all day in a stuffy court, come out with good appetites, and a fine fund of small talk. Counsel who have prosecuted and counsel who have defended prisoners lay aside their differences with their wigs, and the justices who have pronounced sentence promote peace between them all by toasting the bar in port-wine.

Michael sat next to Mr. Armstrong, and was formally introduced to the chairman who had voted against him, the Lord Lieutenant, Marquis of Eastshire. His lordship had sat in several cabinets, and had reached the time of life when old politicians are kind and courteous to all men. The chaplain was touched by his paternal manners and benevolent discourse tinged with demure playfulness. Thus, throwing a glance at the rubicund visage and splendid girth of Mr. Jabbot, Lord Eastshire said :—"I believe the air of our county did not agree with Mr. Jabbot. I hope it may not prove so injurious to *you*."

Nothing of consequence occurred at the dinner, except that during dessert it transpired that Michael Christy was not married. Everybody was astonished. A gaol chaplain ought never to be a bachelor. "Surely," said Mr. Armstrong, "the advertisement in the county paper and London *Guardian* stipulated that candidates were to be married men?" But Michael, assured that no such proviso had met his eyes, requested that a copy of the last *Eastshire Chronicle* might be brought. He reddened to perceive so many humorous glances of lawyers fixed on him. A waiter fetched the county paper, and it was soon shown that the advertisement said nothing of marriage. Evidently Mr. Fidler, the clerk of the peace, had been absent-minded when he wrote it; but somebody said that Mr. Fidler was never absent-minded, only that he had been laid up with gout of late, and that his clerk, Giles, had done all his business. So the blame was transferred to Giles, clerk to the clerk of the peace.

Michael hastened to say that if he had been elected owing to any misunderstanding he would put his resignation into the justices' hands; but this proposal only provoked merriment. All the table

seemed disposed to take a jocular view of the situation, the more so as the chaplain was evidently flurried.

"There is no need to resign, the mistake can be easily remedied," said Lord Eastshire with a smile.

"By marrying, my lord?" asked Michael, rather dismayed.

"If you have no objection," answered the old nobleman, bowing over his glass, at which there was quite an explosion of mirth.

"Don't go courting any of the female prisoners, Mr. Christy," said a red-faced justice, winking.

"I don't see why he shouldn't if his intentions are honourable," opined a barrister, who was the jolly dog of the circuit.

"Marriage doesn't improve a clergyman, so far as I can see," remarked Mr. Jabbot, artlessly.

"It is 'a fond thing vainly invented:' my brother gave that definition of it at an examination for deacon's orders," cut in another barrister, still jollier.

Michael was obliged to enter into the spirit of these and other pleasantries; but he asked his neighbour in a whisper whether it was seriously necessary that he should marry?

"Not exactly," replied Mr. Armstrong. "It was the custom to have married chaplains, but a chaplain who became a widower did not on that account vacate his office, so there could be no hard rule on the subject. I suppose, though, you have none of the new ideas about celibacy?" inquired the young magistrate, amused.

"Oh, no," answered Michael, in the same vein; and there the matter rested. Soon afterwards the company dispersed, and he went off to the bed-room in the hotel which he had bespoken during the day.

A bright fire awaited him and a four-post bedstead, but though the mattresses were soft and the dinner had been good, the chaplain lay awake, reflecting that the matrimonial question was a mishap. He could not marry to retain his chaplaincy, and could not resign the chaplaincy for the sake of avoiding marriage. The dilemma ended by stirring his sense of the ludicrous and sent him to sleep. Next morning, after an early breakfast in the coffee-room, he set out in murky weather to join in the gaol chapel service at a quarter past nine.

He had never been inside a prison before, and had confused notions of what he was going to see. He pictured—though he knew it must be absurd—a number of benches crowded with men of rascally countenance, elbowing and kicking each other, whilst husky-voiced turnkeys shouted to them in violent language to keep quiet. An illustration which he had seen in a pictorial 'Life of Howard' kept floating before his eyes, and his ears were filled with a din of

fetters and handcuffs, mingled with the sobbing of prisoners who were less hardened than the others. The reality was in most respects better, in some worse, than he had expected.

He had been instructed not to call at the chaplain's private residence, but to ring at the great door of the prison. A postern was opened by a gatekeeper six feet high, in uniform, who touched his peaked cap, and conducted him across a spacious yard, in a corner of which stood the black prisoners' van which had been used the day before. They ascended a flight of six stone steps, a door was unlocked, and Michael passed into a flagged corridor, on either side of which were oaken doors with painted inscriptions in white letters. These were the visitors' waiting-rooms, the surgery, governor's and deputy-governor's offices, magistrates' meeting-room, and finally, the chaplain's official apartment. Here they knocked, but Mr. Jabbot not being within, Michael's guide requested him to enter, and went away to announce his coming.

The place was a very capharnaum of disorder and dust. The new chaplain, who loved tidiness, winced at the sight of Bibles and ledgers strewn about the cocoa-nut matting of the floor, of hymn-books lying under the coal-scuttle, whilst old newspapers, broken quills, and empty tins, marked "Australian beef," encumbered the shelves where the books ought to be. The table groaned under a heap of opened and unopened letters, tradesmen's bills, lists of new prisoners, and of prisoners for discharge, old copies of the *Police Gazette*, bits of string, biscuit-crumbs, oxydized steel pens, tracts, and volumes of sermons. The pewter inkstand was filled with lucifer matches, the receptacle for ink was a cracked saucer; on the mantelshelf stood an uncorked bottle of stout, with a tumbler containing dregs of stale beer. The only available seat was the arm-chair at the table; all the others were tenanted by things not meant to be sat upon, and on one figured a pot of glue.

Michael stood on the hearth-rug counting the minutes. The clock over the fireplace marked ten past nine, and still there were no signs of Mr. Jabbot. He flustered in just at the stroke of the quarter, hot and angry, with a splash of egg-yolk on his chin, and dragging his surplice after him. He had no hood or stole. Mrs. Jabbot had gone off with them—and he was sure that all the clocks in the place were fast, for his own watch was wrong.

"Come along," said he; "we've not a moment to lose. This is the way—up the stairs; first door to your right, and the furthest pew in the gallery—you'll find books on the seat." Michael hastened as directed, and suddenly saw himself in a gallery, fronting two hundred prisoners, pale and quiet as statues.

A person who has attended service in a prison chapel never forgets the first impression it caused him. The heart contracts, and the eyes stare with insatiable curiosity.

Like all other county gaols, that of Eastshire was conducted on the silent system. Prisoners were forbidden to speak to one another, or even to see one another's faces. Outside their cells they wore caps provided with long cloth peaks, which were pierced with eye-holes, and fell to their chins like masks. As a token of identity every man wore, hooked to the left breast of his jacket, a round brass plate, bearing in black the letters of his division and the numbers of his ward and cell (as A_6^1 ; B_{12}^2 &c.), and as they filed to their separate boxes in chapel, each prisoner, after pulling the door behind him, hung his plate to a hook suspended above his head. These plates were so highly polished that even when no sun-rays streamed through the tall windows, they flashed like so many reflectors.

The method of letting the men out of their cells into chapel was so managed that it was impossible they could hold any communication with one another without being detected. A warder hurried along the wards, unlocking the doors; the men passed out, following each other at distances of at least five feet, under the eyes of other warders stationed along the galleries and upon the bridges that spanned the wards; and on reaching the chapel, every file passed, without noise or confusion, into a row of boxes like those in a pawnbroker's shop. A prisoner was required to keep his wits about him, for if an obstruction occurred, the whole file had to halt sharp; should any man, from inattention, walk on and jostle his leader, he was punished by a day's solitary confinement on bread and water. Once inside their boxes, which closed with spring-locks, the men could only see to the front of them, and could not be released save by a warder, who pulled a handle unlocking all the doors of a row at once. There were on either side of the chapel ten of these rows, rising tier upon tier, and each containing twenty boxes, so that the chapel, when full, could have accommodated four hundred prisoners. A gangway ran up the middle of the chapel, and was itself divided by a wooden partition ten feet high, which served the double purpose of preventing the prisoners of the right wing of the prison from seeing those from the left, who marched in through a contiguous door at the same time, and also of preventing the prisoners in the uppermost boxes from perceiving the heads of the lowermost to the extreme right or left of them, as the case might be—which it would have been impossible for them to do had there been no obstruction to break the line of sight. However, with one

exception—which would seem to have occurred at a time of election riots in Tolminster—the prison had never been known to contain more than two hundred inmates, so that the uppermost rows were generally empty.

Michael Christy had ensconced himself in one of the three pews of the gallery, which ran along the width of the building, above the altar. That in the centre was reserved for the governor and his family; to the left of the governor's was the deputy-governor's; to the right, the chaplain's. Each of these pews contained sitting room for about a dozen persons, so that occasional visitors who attended the services, with the governor's leave, were at no loss to find places.

From such elevated posts of observation the face of every prisoner could be seen with perfect distinctness—wherefore a space in each pew was set apart for a warder, who sat with a slate before him to take note of any man whom he might detect misbehaving himself. There were also warders in the gangway on either side of the partition-wall, and a couple more on the floor of the chapel to right and left of the pulpit and clerk's desk, which rose, one above the other, a few steps in front of the altar. From every point a prisoner could behold eyes fixed upon him, and ready to espy his slightest movement—nay, the most fleeting smile which might wear a look of irreverence; and he could, moreover, notice that the warder's ears were vigilantly strained to catch the faintest sounds which might betray attempts at mutual communication by means of whispers or of knuckle-knocks on the partition-walls of the boxes. The extreme importance of hindering all exchange of signals was owing to this—that there were but fifteen warders to control two hundred men (many of them most desperate characters), whence any laxity in the enforcement of the silence rule might have led to conspiracies, and hence to mutiny. The tongue is a prisoner's most dangerous member; strike him dumb and he becomes helpless.

By the time the chaplain had, with an involuntary shudder, taken in the *tout-ensemble* of his new congregation, Mr. Jabbot had ascended the pulpit, which also served as reading-desk, and had plumped down on his knees, burying his head in his sleeves. The interval of the preliminary prayer gave Michael time to notice that the prisoners were divided into categories, distinguishable by the variety of their costumes. The lowermost row on the left was occupied by men under remand or awaiting trial—some of whom wore the "untried prisoners'" uniform of pepper and salt jacket, waistcoat, and trousers, whilst others were attired in their own clothes. Among these was an infantry soldier in scarlet tunic, and a horse-artilleryman in a handsome braided jacket. The next rows

on the left were filled by men, some of them very old, who were not doing hard labour of the first or second class, and who were arrayed in buff with broad diagonal bands of black, zebra-wise; all the others, being hard labour men, or men under sentence of penal servitude, who were awaiting transfer to convict establishments, were dressed in parti-coloured garments of brown and yellow, most staring and infamous to the sight. The lowermost row to the right was for the women prisoners, of whom there were about a dozen, clothed in blue and white check dresses and capes, and horrible brown straw poke-bonnets without trimming. A matron and a female warder, sitting in a curtained pew placed in a corner of the chapel floor, kept guard over this dozen, who, for shiftiness of look and brazen boldness of feature, were worse than all the men put together.

Indeed, the prevailing expression among the men was not indifference or defiance: they seemed to be apathetic, or cowed. Here and there a boy might be seen glancing about him like a caged sparrow, and some few of the men had the vacant grin of semi-idiotcy. But the majority had apparently discovered that prison discipline was not a thing to be trifled with, and bowed their necks with resignation to the iron yoke. They cast shy looks towards the warders, and fumbled their prayer-books with an uneasy air, as if by merely turning over the leaves with too much noise they might bring themselves into trouble.

There were red moreen curtains to the pew which Michael Christy occupied, and he drew them, feeling that unless he secluded himself from view he should never be able to join in the prayers. Mr. Jabbot had commenced the exhortation, and gabbled through all the service at a precipitate pace. He seemed to address his supplications to heaven in a tone of irritable protest, and hardly paused to allow the clerk, whom Michael had not been able to see, to roar "Amen!" in a voice like a drill-sergeant's. The responses were few and timorous, and the men never knelt; for as the front ledges of their boxes rose to a level with their chests, they would by kneeling have withdrawn themselves from view. They were allowed to sit down, however, during the reading of the one lesson. The whole service occupied a little less than twenty minutes, and was marked by no incident of an impressive nature till the time came for the congregation to join in a hymn.

Mr. Jabbot read out the first verse of a beautiful song of peace:

"When at thy footstool, Lord, I bend,
And plead with Thee for mercy there,
Think of the sinner's dying Friend,
And for His sake receive my prayer."

There being no organ, it was the leather-lunged clerk who led the singing, and he did it in a voice diapasoning between the bellow of a bull and the exquisite modulations of a steam fog-whistle. The entire congregation chorussed in a similar strain of tuneless noise. As if to make up for the compulsory taciturnity of their wretched lives, the men raised their voices to the fullest pitch—howling, yelling, bawling—without any concern for time or harmony; the men who could sing, and those who couldn't, blending their efforts in one resounding and hideous cacophony. It was something to tremble at. A concert of penned hyenas and jackals could not have produced worse discord; and taking all circumstances into consideration, the performance of wild beasts would have been less shocking to the nerves of a worshipper who attached such importance as Michael Christy did to good devotional music, and who shrank from this senseless riot as from a desecration of a holy place.

The service ended, Mr. Jabbot scampered away; but Michael drew back his curtain, and lingered yet awhile to watch the men troop out of chapel. Their exodus was controlled by means of a telegraph-board worked by a chief warder, who sat in a seat next the governor's raised chair. Upon the departure of the minister, an order of "caps on" made all the men unhook their plates and fasten them to their jackets; then don their caps and pull their peaks down, so that the two hundred boxes presented a sinister mass of masked faces. The chief warder, having eyed the assembly for a moment to see that nobody had been tardy in obeying, motioned to the warders in the gangway, who began to unlock the rows of boxes by pulling the spring-handles already described. Only one row was unlocked at a time, and it was not till all the men in it had filed out that the turn of the next came.

The signal to go out was given by the chief warder, who jerked a couple of strings attached to revolving wheels, bearing black letters or numbers, which showed themselves consecutively through apertures in a large white board. The right wheel exhibited the serial letters of each row, and only revolved once for twenty revolutions of the left wheel, which indicated the numbers of the boxes. As the front ledge of every box was inscribed with a letter and number, all that a prisoner had to do was to watch the telegraph-board till his number appeared, then push back his door, and walk out with all the celerity he could command, though without diminishing the distance of five feet, which, upon all occasions, he was bound to maintain between himself and the prisoner in front. The only delays were caused by men who could not read, or who were short-

sighted, and who had to be shouted to by their cell numbers (as, "Now then A, 2, 20, move out sharp!"); but the whole work of egress was concluded in ten minutes, and the building re-echoed with the banging of distant doors by the men returning to their cells, whence the majority of them were soon to be summoned afresh for the various hard labours of the day—the tread-wheel, the crank; the pumps, or mat-making.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CHRISTY IS INSTRUCTED AS TO HIS NEW DUTIES.

MICHAEL CHRISTY left the chapel, feeling depressed by what he had seen. At the foot of the staircase he encountered a tall, thin man with a hook nose, who bore a marvellous resemblance to the great Duke of Wellington. This was Captain Keyser, the prison governor, who was lying in wait to introduce himself.

Lying in wait is the exact term, for Captain Keyser was a shy man, who would have been painfully abashed by a presentation before third parties. He much preferred getting through so trying an ordeal in a corner exposed to draughts.

The Captain had nothing military except his title. He was a nervous person, who continually twisted his neck, as if he were trying to wriggle out of his shirt. His bony hands, during conversation, were always busy pulling down his wristbands, or fingering the lappets of his coat. His eyes blinked weakly, like an owl's in the day-light, and his pale, tightly-drawn lips seemed incapable of smiling. He wore an ill-brushed hat of monumental height, perched on the back of his head; also a limp gill shirt-collar, swathed in the triple folds of an orange silk neckerchief with white spots. Nobody else ever wore such a neckerchief. Captain Keyser had a deprecating way of eyeing his boots, as if troubled by a recollection of the price they had cost him; and the habitual expression of his physiognomy was one of woe-begone bewilderment, as though he had seen so much that was evil in life; but was prepared for anything that might turn up next. For all this, Michael thought he could discern in the gentle tones of his voice the signs of a kind heart, and felt drawn towards him. The two shook hands and were friends henceforth.

Captain Keyser expressed his readiness to show Michael round the prison, in case Mr. Jabbot should be too busy to do so. He begged him to choose his own hour; but if one o'clock would suit he hoped the chaplain would do him the further pleasure of coming to lunch at his house at half-past one, and be introduced to Mrs. Keyser. However, while this courteous proposal was being made, Mr. Jabbot ran out into the passage, tossing his arms aloft as if he were being harried by numerous invisible enemies.

"Come along, Christy," he cried peevishly. "I must be off by the 12.10 train, and I've lots of things to say to you. How I shall get through them all Heaven only knows! . . ."

(Captain Keyser had moved off like a mild-tempered stork at the sight of a noisy barn-door cock.)

"That governor is always thrusting himself in the way at the wrong moment," complained Mr. Jabbot, when he and his successor were alone together. "You'll soon find out what an impossible character he is to deal with. I only wish for my part he would mind his own business and let me do mine—See here: it is the duty of the chaplain to read all letters written by, or addressed to, prisoners, and to mark them with his initials. Here are a number that have been lying on my table for a week: I have not found a single moment to attend to them."

"Dear me! Perhaps some of the poor fellows have been fretting at getting no news from their friends," ejaculated Michael with concern.

"How can I help it, man?" cried Mr. Jabbot, as if everybody were to blame save himself. "If you ever have such a wife as Mrs. Jabbot, you'll find that a man can't even call his soul his own. She telegraphs from Margate this morning that she has left a pair of stays in a drawer which she neglects to specify, and I'm not to forget to bring them. . ."

"I suppose I had better take charge of these letters," said Christy, perceiving that the post-mark on one was a fortnight old.

"Yes, do, please; and when you have read them make a note, in this ledger, of the cell-numbers written on the envelopes, for prisoners may only write and receive a letter once in three months. Mind you are very strict in this rule, else they'll play you tricks and write oftener. Then, again, here's a ledger in which you enter the names and sentences of prisoners, the particulars of their offences, the dates of your visits to them, and any observations which you may have to make about their spiritual state—those of them who have a spiritual state."

"Are there any restrictions upon the number of a chaplain's

visits?" asked Michael, who noticed but sparse mention of these items in the ledger.

"Oh no, much the contrary," answered Mr. Jabbot, with a moan. "If you listened to the regulations you'd be always at it, and have no time to eat, drink, or sleep. Amongst other absurd rules, there's one that obliges a chaplain to go to a prisoner every time he is sent for, so that you are at the mercy of any ragamuffin who wants to have a ten minutes' talk with somebody about his soul. You'll soon fall into the way of that, though, and learn to pay your calls when it suits you. There are some prisoners, for instance, whom it is never worth while visiting at all."

"What prisoners are those?" asked the new chaplain.

"Why, the incorrigible tramps and petty thieves," said Mr. Jabbot, who was rummaging in all corners of his room. "What's the use of talking to a fellow who comes to prison half a dozen times every year, and who laughs at you as soon as your back is turned? Most of them can't read or write, and they put up here again and again as if it were an hotel—just for the sake of the food and shelter while the weather is bad. Each of them would require a special missionary to convert him, and even then the work couldn't be done under a year if they were preached at day and night. However, you shall see some of them in a minute. We are expected to question prisoners on the day after their entrance, and I'll call in yesterday's batch—not the quarter sessions' cases; I'd best leave them to you—but the summary convictions."

Mr. Jabbot touched the bell, and a warder appeared with a slip of blue paper in his hand.

"Is that the petty sessions' list, Thresher?" inquired the ex-chaplain. "Ah, yes. Three men and a woman: well, bring them in, one at a time."

Mr. Jabbot sat down to his table behind an open ledger, and Michael stood with his back to the chimney-piece, while the warder, after vanishing for a brief space, introduced a close-cropped, sickly youth of eighteen, who wore the brown and yellow prison dress.

"Three months, with hard labour, for being drunk and assaulting the police," shouted Mr. Jabbot magisterially from his place. "Why can't you keep your hands off the police, William Hocker?"

"Why don't they keep thear'n off me, zur?" replied William, sulkily.

"The police are established for the punishment of evil-doers, and you are bound to submit yourselves to them, as St. Paul enjoins you to do in a chapter which you will find in your Bible," cried Mr. Jabbot, sharply. "There, take a Bible, prayer and hymn-book

from that corner. This is the third time you have been in gaol, William Hocker. If you don't mend your manners you'll come to the gallows."

William fingered the spot where his forelock ought to have been, and skulked out. The next prisoner who was ushered in declared he was "'ard o' 'earing and no scholar." He was an old tramp of at least sixty, battered and grey, but inoffensive enough as far as appearances went.

"Why bless my soul, this is you again, John Tredgett," exclaimed Mr. Jabbot, leaning back. "If I've seen you here once, I've seen you twenty times. You've been at your old game, I see—twenty-one days for tramping and sleeping under hay-ricks!"

"I be 'ard o' 'earing, sur, and no scholar," drivelled John, with a hand to his ear; "and I finds it 'ard to get a livin', sur, because o' my rheumatics. They've been awfu'y bad on me this rainy season, sur."

"Pooh, pooh! you only pretend to be deaf so as not to hear the scolding you deserve," said Mr. Jabbot, waving his hand. "And you say you can't read: well then, take and study your Bible; you'll find it will teach you more than all the other books in the world. At least, no—if you can't read, it's, of course, no use giving you a Bible. Get along with you . . ."

A minute's interval, and John Tredgett's place was taken by a very small boy, who shuffled in with his knuckles in his eyes, and wearing a pair of shoes much too large for him. He was clothed in the zebra dress of buff and black, also much too large.

"Ah! Harry Nokes. Fourteen days, and twelve strokes with the birch for climbing over a wall and stealing plums," broke out Mr. Jabbot, with evident relish. "Well, I'm glad you're to be birched, Harry Nokes—a whipping will do you all the good in the world."

"Booh-ooh-ooh," blubbered young Nokes.

"Boys who steal plums must expect to smart for it," continued Mr. Jabbot. "When I was young my masters birched me, and it improved me vastly. I don't know what sort of a man I should have become but for those floggings."

Michael turned away to hide a smile, and Harry Nokes was heard snivelling, that if he were let off for this once he would promise never to offend again. But Mr. Jabbot remained inexorable, the more so as he had no power to alter the sentence.

"I wouldn't forgive you if I could, sir. There, take a Bible, and when you get back to your cell, go down on your knees and pray that the birch may change you into a good boy."

There was a pause of some minutes after Harry Nokes's departure ; then the door was opened by a comely and lady-like woman of thirty, dressed in a purple merino gown, with very white collarette and cuffs, and a blue bow at her throat. She slightly bowed to Michael, and Mr. Jabbot introduced her as Mrs. Baillie, the matron of the female wing. Mrs. Baillie was altogether a different person from what one would have expected to meet in such a situation— younger, smarter, and more cheerful. She had chestnut hair very neatly dressed, a pink complexion, white hands, and feet daintily shod. However, a closer scrutiny revealed a steel-keenness in her eyes, and an upper lip rather too firmly-chiselled to please admirers of the soft graces in woman. After the first favourable impression which the sight of an agreeable face must needs cause, Michael Christy felt—without being able to account for the prejudice—that he should have liked the matron of the prison to be otherwise than Mrs. Baillie was. He doubted whether he should soon feel at his ease with her.

Male prisoners are allowed to see the chaplain alone, but the Prison Act requires that a female prisoner shall only be interviewed under the eye of a matron or female warder. Wherefore, Mrs. Baillie, having obtained leave to bring in her last-come charge, beckoned to a woman in the passage, and remained in the room with her, instead of retiring as the warder had done.

Fourteen days' imprisonment in default of a fine of forty shillings and costs for using abusive language to, and breaking the windows of, a respectable grocer—such was the sentence of Mary Dash, aged twenty-two. She walked in, crying bitterly, but seemingly less grieved about her sentence than about the brown bonnet that had been put on her, for she sobbed that she had never felt so disgraced in her life before.

"If you wanted to wear a smart bonnet, you shouldn't have broken windows," was Mr. Jabbot's judicious remark.

"That grocer is the father of my child, please, sir," cried Mary Dash, making a free use of her blue cotton handkerchief. "I was a servant in his house, sir, till his wife turned me away ; and now he refuses to give me anything to support the child with. He's used me shameful."

"Put away your handkerchief and hold your head up, Nine," said Mrs. Baillie, curtly.

"Well, I hope a fortnight's imprisonment will make you more reasonable," said Mr. Jabbot with calmness. "The way of transgressors is hard, as you have probably found out by this time. There's a Bible and prayer-book for you. By the way, Mrs. Baillie, how is Fifteen this morning?"

"In the same state as before, sir," answered the matron, letting out Nine; "but as she ate nothing of late, Dr. Hardy has put her upon sick diet of milk and beef-tea."

"She still refuses to come to chapel?"

"Oh yes, sir, it is of no use talking to her on that subject."

"Ah, well, that's a puzzling case, and I expect she'll give you a great deal of trouble, Christy. Fifteen is Margaret Field of whom I spoke to you yesterday. Well, Mrs. Baillie, as I am going away at noon, I'll take this opportunity of wishing you good-bye. I—a—feel regret at parting with you."

"We shall be sorry to lose *you*, sir," replied Mrs Baillie politely, but without any indications of sorrow.

"My duties will for the future be discharged by Mr. Christy," added Mr. Jabbot grandly. "I am sure you and he will get on together."

Michael bent his head and Mrs. Baillie returned the bow. Again he felt that a long while must elapse before he could be familiar with this well-looking and composed person, who spoke, bowed, and retired with the air of a perfect gentlewoman.

"Mrs. Baillie is a most respectable person," said Mr. Jabbot confidentially, when the door had closed. "She was a governess in Lord Eastshire's family till she married an officer, who died soon after, leaving her childless and almost destitute. It was his lordship who procured her the post of matron, and she is much esteemed here. She is the only person in the gaol who has never given me any trouble."

"Is she kind to the prisoners?" inquired Michael.

"Stands no nonsense from them; and that's the only way to be kind to those persons," replied Mr. Jabbot.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VISITING JUSTICES.

AN hour after this the Reverend Jeremy Jabbot had left the prison for good. He was in such a violent hurry that he forgot his umbrella. He was persuaded that he should miss the train, but stammered some apologies at starting for not having initiated Michael more fully into the routine of his duties. As a fact he had told him next to nothing, for the greater part of the last hour had been taken

up by a hunt after Mrs. Jabbot's stays, in which Michael had been requested to join. Leaving the office for this purpose, and repairing to the chaplain's private house, Mr. Jabbot's parting words as he stepped into the fly were :

"I say, don't you marry; it isn't necessary, and won't help you in the least. I think I've left my keys in the wine-cellar. No; here they are. Have you two sixpences for a shilling? Thanks. I'm sure I shall be late, but I am inexpressibly glad to get away. Good-bye."

Michael had not expected to be inducted thus unprepared into his new cure of souls. He had calculated that the ex-chaplain would remain at least a week or two to assist him. He had not brought any luggage to Tolminster besides a carpet-bag, for he had not felt sure of his election, and had, at all events, counted on returning to his late curacy to collect his goods, and take regular leave of his vicar, to whose service he was bound for another month. All these plans were disturbed by Mr. Jabbot's hasty proceedings. Michael's first act when alone was to send out a telegram by a warder, apprising his vicar of how matters stood, and requested that his luggage might be forwarded to him. This done, he entered, *per saltum*, into his chaplaincy, and found that he had as much work to do as would occupy every hour of his time that day.

A hard worker by nature, he applied himself to his task without delay, feeling at once a deep sense of his new responsibilities. He had been saddened, and put rather out of conceit with his work, by what Mr. Jabbot had said, for he could not but ask himself whether it were not presumption on his part to accuse his predecessor of negligence without knowing what difficulties he had had to encounter? Those difficulties might be so considerable that he himself would repent having undertaken labours above his strength. Michael was the more troubled by this reflection, as he had been forced by no circumstances of need into applying for a prison chaplaincy. He had an Oxford fellowship worth £250 a year, and a small private property amounting to about £3000 in the funds. His connections had also expressed their willingness to procure him suitable preferment whenever he should ask for it. But he had voluntarily declined several such offers, and had devoted himself to a city curacy, under the impression that he was doing good there: and, again, when the chaplaincy at Tolminster had fallen vacant he had competed for it against the advice of his friends, from the belief that he should find a yet more promising field for the tasks which he longed to perform in his Maker's service. All this might look like disinterestedness in the eyes of men, but in God's judgment it might be mere vanity;

and Michael wondered whether, in overlooking the hardships of his position, and thinking only of triumphs to be won, he had not acted lightly, forgetting that the chosen vessels of the Lord must be purified many times in the fire.

The fact is, that Michael Christy's path hitherto had been full of sunshine. He had been the pet of loving parents, and after their deaths—which occurred when he was too young to feel them as an irreparable loss—he had been educated by his uncle, Sir Wemyss Christy, who had proved a kind guardian, and had placed him under tutors who had trained him in all the ways that make a man good and give him happiness. By-and-by he had met with a good rector, genial patrons, and warm friends, who, by their encouragements and approval, had rendered his parochial work easy. Michael's only anxieties had arisen from the extravagances of his brother, Frank, who was behaving somewhat wildly in the army; but he took so much pleasure in relieving the embarrassments of the well-beloved scapegrace that he could hardly account as trials Frank's frequent and always affectionate petitions for money. Their mother had said to him on her death-bed:—"Take care of Frank; when you are both men he will need your advice." And, though he was by two years the younger, he had always looked upon his brother as confided specially to his charge. Thus, Michael Christy had been nurtured in the temperate atmosphere of family joys, and the frosty season of his life had not yet set in. He was so warm of heart that he had more cause than most other men to apprehend the sharp winds of unkindness, and he knew his own nature well enough to feel that even a lack of sympathy among those who surrounded him would chill him sadly.

When he had returned from the chaplain's house to the official room that for the future was to be his, Michael locked the door and knelt to pray for strength. He prayed against uncharitableness, that he might not judge the work of another man, or vain-gloriously presume to rush in where others had feared to tread, relying on his own efforts unassisted. He prayed for humility and courage; and, finally, that Heaven would bless his ministry, sending him work that he might have power to accomplish in steadfastness and simplicity of heart—nothing boasting, and yet nothing doubting of God's willingness to help him every time he should call for aid.

He rose from his knees comforted, and betook himself at once to the occupation of reading the letters which Mr. Jabbot ought to have disposed of. He had not been so engaged long, however, when two of the visiting justices arrived to make their weekly inspection of the prison; and one of these being Mr. Hugh Armstrong, Michael

was disturbed by a knock, immediately followed by the entrance of his new friend. The young magistrate was attired in a cutaway coat, new dog-skin gloves, and sported a rose-bud in his button-hole. He was all health and good humour.

"Hard at work already, I see," he said, shaking hands. "Have you been round the prison yet?"

"Not yet," answered Michael, clearing a chair of a pile of papers and drawing it near the fire. "Mr. Jabbot has only been gone half an hour, and I am to go round with the governor at one."

"You had better do it with us, for Admiral Woodstock and I are going the round of the cells. Well, I'm glad we've got rid of Mr. Jabbot at last. He was the toughest old obstructive I ever saw."

"Mr. Jabbot found the prison work hard, I think," said Michael.

"Pooh! That's because he never tried to do it. His manner of conducting himself had become a scandal, and I expect we should have had to remove him if he had not levanted of his own accord."

"I am glad that you appear to take an interest in the prison," remarked Michael, willing to change the subject.

"I do—a very great interest; and remember this, that though the term visiting-justices is a collective entity, it means, so far as this gaol is concerned, simply your humble servant; so if you have anything to complain of, just speak to me."

"That's a good thing to know," said Michael, smiling.

"So it is; but the case stands in this way:—We are four visiting justices; my father, Mr. Bunney, an old corn-chandler, the Admiral, and I. My father and Mr. Bunney are for the *suaviter in modo* plan, but they always cave in to the Admiral and me, who go in for the *fortiter in re*; and the Admiral, I may tell you, does me the honour of never acting without my advice. However, we have all one common object, which is to see the prison well managed."

"And I suppose you have every reason to be satisfied in that particular?"

"Not by any means," replied Mr. Armstrong, emphatically.

"The prison is downright disorderly and mutinous."

"You surprise me!" ejaculated Michael, who in truth felt surprised.

"Did you attend the chapel service this morning?" inquired the magistrate.

"Yes, and it struck me the men were quiet to a degree I could never have imagined."

"H'm ! the punishment-list tells a different story, I fancy. I'll bet you that every day for months, perhaps years, past, there have been men on bread and water for knocking at one another's partitions, and yelling messages to one another during the hymns. That's all they sing for ; and the fault of that rests with our precious Mr. Jabbot."

"Surely not?" exclaimed Michael. "Mr. Jabbot complained of being a little fagged, but he seemed very zealous for good discipline."

"Moonshine ! The best disciplinarian in every prison is the chaplain himself. When you find the warders always complaining of the men, and the men of the warders—when each sticks up for his rights, quotes the regulations, and abuses the other ; when the doctor is bothered by men who sham sick, the governor by remonstrances about ill-cooked food and badly-warmed cells, and the justices by all sorts of jars among the officers themselves—when, in fact, every man in the place has his bristles up and his tongue wagging, which is what I mean by a mutinous state—for it's the only form of the thing possible in these prisons—then depend upon it the chaplain does not know his business. If, on the contrary, the prisoners are pretty cheerful, and the punishment-slate clean ; if the governor finds time to smoke his pipe, and the doctor to crack a joke with you, then the chaplain knows his work and does it. A prison is exactly what a chaplain makes it."

"Ah !" said Michael, thrilling.

"Yes. The governor and we magistrates can inflict punishments, but if these don't cow a prisoner they only make him worse. The chaplain is the sole person who can go to a man in his cell, clap him on the shoulder, and say : 'Come, my good fellow, aren't you tired of all this? Surely it will pay you better to behave yourself now, and turn over a new leaf when you get out.' So you see, Christy, you have plenty of work cut out for you if you feel inclined for it."

"I hope, indeed, I may do my work so as to please you," answered Michael fervently.

"We are all sure you will ; and, believe me, you will render us a great service, for we none of us like to see this place in a disreputable condition," said Mr. Armstrong, rising. "However, it's time for us to be going now, for I hear the admiral's cork leg thumping down the passage. By-the-by," added he, pausing with his hand on the door, "have you seen the *Times* this morning? The 12th Dragoons are coming to Tolminster."

"My brother's regiment!" exclaimed Michael, brightening. "Why, I thought Canterbury was to be their next station !"

"It's some War Office freak that has produced the alteration, and the 12th are to come at once instead of waiting till the spring. I believe the real truth is they have been going it a little fast at 'London on the Sea,' and both the justices and the corporation are anxious to get rid of them before the winter gaieties set in. A little bird whispered to me that the borough members had even been deputed to beg their transfer of government, *sotto voce*."

A shade passed over Michael's face. He wondered whether the little bird had been equally communicative as to any share which Captain Christy might have had in the 12th's ill-doings, for it was an amiable peculiarity of Frank's to be in all scrapes the first man in and the last out. A few days more would no doubt settle this point in the usual manner; *i. e.* by a letter, in which Frank would confess fresh sins, and request money to pay him clear of them, "just for this once more." Meanwhile, it was a relief to Michael to hear that his brother would soon be with him, for he had always exercised an ascendancy over the gay spendthrift when the latter was immediately under his eye. Mr. Armstrong had passed out of the room, so Michael put on his hat and followed him down the passage, thence through a glazed door where two warders mounted guard. Here began the limits of the prison proper.

A vague odour of tar, proceeding from the oakum which the prisoners picked, and a purring noise of slowly-revolving wheels, were the first impressions that greeted a visitor. Then the eyes were dazzled by a universal splendour of white-wash, over-polished steel, and glittering brass.

Everybody who has seen a model gaol knows the pattern on which they are built, one and all. The only differences come from the size—the smaller ones being cruciform, the larger shaped like wheels, every spoke of which is represented by a wing or division. That of Tolminster had four wings (not counting the women's, which stood apart), whereof two ran to right and left of the central dome, forming an avenue about a hundred yards long and thirty feet wide, which occupied the whole length of the building, while the two others started out from the centre in the shape of a V. Each wing comprised three stories or wards, of thirty-four cells a-piece, and round the two upper wards of each wing ran galleries connected at frequent points by flat bridges. Thus, no floors obstructing the view, a warder standing under the dome could in three glances sweep the whole prison from top to bottom.

The ground-floor was paved with reddish tiles; the galleries, and bridges, with slate. The railings of the galleries and bridges, and the balusters of the flying staircases, were of shining steel; the bells,

gas-burners, water-cocks, and all knobs whatsoever, of brass. A broad beading of black paint and drab gray ran along the bases of the walls and around the cell-doors, to relieve the monotony of the whitewash; and the cell-doors, which stood in recesses two feet deep, formed by the thickness of the walls, were painted also in drab gray, studded with large square-headed black nails. Everything was specklessly clean and monastically silent. Here and there a prisoner flitted about, masked and mute, on prison domestic work, or a warder in prim blue tunic with brass buttons moved about on his rounds; but their footsteps made no noise. The only audible sounds were that perpetual whirr of wheels which came from the treadmill and cranks, and the occasional sharp ring of a bell pulled by a prisoner who wanted something. All such summonses were attended to instantaneously, for a black numbered plate, that flew out at right angles to the wall, would designate the cell whence the ring came, and bring up one of the warders on indoor duty.

Truly, all the sightseers who came to inspect Tolminster Gaol pronounced it a marvel of good management—disorderliness or mutiny were terms which it would have made them exclaim to hear mentioned in relation to such a place.

Yet that things were going very wrong indeed inside this model house was evident from the dark looks of Admiral Woodstock—a big, red-faced leonine tar—as he stood talking with the governor under the dome. Captain Keyser fidgetted with his whiskers and shirt-front, blinked and hemmed, and declared he couldn't understand it. At the moment when Michael and Mr. Armstrong joined them they were discussing the incorrigible criminality of a prisoner, who, having been punished half a dozen times already within less than three months, had broken out again into insolence and insubordination. The Admiral vowed that an example must be made of him.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Christy?" he said, for they had met the night before. "I say, Armstrong, there's that rascal whom we put in the refractory cells for a fortnight, last month, who has been at it again—abusing the governor, banging his mess-tin about, and refusing to pick his oakum."

"We'll teach him a lesson," said Mr. Armstrong, stroking his moustache.

"It will be the dinner-hour in ten minutes," remarked the governor, glancing up at the clock over the door; "but we shall just have time to see the men on the wheel before they come off."

"All right; tell the warder to lead the way," said the Admiral.

"Armstrong, I'll lean upon you, for this leg of mine always feels cranky off a deck."

A warder moved off in front, and Captain Keyser, as he strode behind, planted his hat resolutely over his eyebrows. When Michael got to know the Captain better, he learned what a deep significance attached to the position of this hat. In the familiarity of social intercourse, when he could afford to unbend in his nervous way, Captain Keyser's hat stood at the back of his head, revealing the whole of his wrinkled forehead; but when he went his rounds of the prison it was set squarely over his brow, concealing all but his eyes, which derived a darker shade from the projecting brim. It was at these times that the governor's resemblance to the Iron Duke was most striking. He looked terrible. On his cold face, every muscle of which was puckered up into an attitude of resistance, there gleamed not a ray of human feeling, so that a prisoner who had a request to prefer often felt his words stick on his tongue from fright. Yet, as Captain Keyser's inner sensibilities were always urging him to do kinder things than was prudent, he had a trick of jerking up a shoulder, as if he meant to cut an importunate interview short by bolting off sideways. Michael was entertained by numerous illustrations of these queer characteristics during the visit to the mills, where the prisoners gave no little trouble.

The party had gone through a door, crossed a yard, and entered a shed, above which revolved horizontally an apparatus like two sails of a windmill. Five-and-twenty men, seated in open boxes like those in the chapel, were picking oakum; five-and-twenty others, separated by partitions, and resting their hands on iron bars, were treading the steps of a long wheel, which went round at the slow rate of thirty steps a minute. A person wishing to form a notion of this fatiguing and useless exercise, has only to fancy himself climbing a staircase which it would take a quarter of an hour to ascend. If he likes to climb the steps of the London Monument, which can be done in about five minutes, he will procure himself one-third of the sensation, at the cost of aching knee-joints and a swimming brain. The prisoners at Tolminster remained fifteen minutes on the wheel and fifteen off; as one batch descended the other took his place, the interval of rest being always employed at oakum-picking. Hard labour for a hundred men, during seven hours every day, was furnished by this contrivance, for the further side of the shed was tenanted by a second gang of "offs" and "ons." Four warders mounted guard over the whole company.

At the approach of the magistrates, one of these overseers cried, "Visiting Justices!—Stop the wheel!"—whereupon the men who

were on rapidly scrambled off; and the wheel, left to its own impetus, revolved but once more and then stopped. Meanwhile, the magistrates, followed by the governor and Michael, walked along the rows of prisoners, asking, "Anything to say?—anything to say?" Now in a well-governed prison there ought to be nothing to say, and the men should simply make the military salute, and answer, "No, sir"—their masks being, of course, raised during the inspection. But in this mill-shed the magistrates were stopped by at least twenty complaints, bearing upon questions, which, to those who are ignorant of what gaol life is, would seem most frivolous.

One complained that he had been served several times in a week with diseased potatoes; another had demanded that the thermometer should be brought into his cell, and had found it mark but fifty degrees—that is, eight at least below the prescribed temperature. A third wanted to send a letter home, but as he could not write, had applied to the prison school-master, whose duty it is to indite the epistles of the illiterate, and that functionary had paid no heed to his request. A fourth had been sworn at by a warder, contrary to the 45th regulation, which he glibly quoted. A sixth had been complaining for a week of an escape of gas in his cell, but could not get the pipe mended; a seventh had been made to pick several ounces of oakum above his quantity, and so forth.

The best or worst of it was that the justices were bound not only to hearken to such reports with patience, but to investigate them upon oath. They took note of them all, but the delay made them savage.

"That's always the way when we come here," remarked Mr. Armstrong, as they returned to the prison, where the dinner-bell was now ringing. "The Admiral and I shall be occupied for several hours this afternoon going into these charges."

"Egad, the beggars are bent on giving trouble, and they're d—d saucy into the bargain," growled the Admiral.

"It won't do, though, for the cook to send up bad potatoes," continued Mr. Armstrong with irritation.

"And if that engineer doesn't attend to his gas-pipes it will end in a blow-up," said Admiral Woodstock, meaning thereby, a wordy "blow-up."

"I wish I could get the men into better order," said Captain Keyser dismally; "but punishment seems to have no effect on them."

"Well, well, we'll see," replied Mr. Armstrong.

Inside the prison another tour of inspection commenced, and at any other hour it might have elicited more complaints than the first;

for the prisoners at work in their cells, being either "mat-makers," on long-sentence, or short-sentence men, too weak for hard labour, were, generally speaking, more garrulous than their sturdier companions on the treadmill. But in the present instance, being engaged in tackling their Australian beef and potatoes, few of them had much to say. A few cases of bad potatoes, submitted smoking hot to the magisterial scrutiny, did, however, prove that the complaints on this head were not all ill-founded; whilst, as to gas-pipes, a loquacious Irishman, with a twinkle in his eye, besought the Admiral to put his nose on to a pipe, and satisfy himself that there was a stench fit to "pison yer honour." Naturally these undeniable official delinquencies did but add to the ire of the justices, so that it turned out to be a bad job for the prisoner whom the governor had to report for insolence and insubordination.

This man occupied one of the ground-floor cells, and the magistrates came to him last. He was a soldier, about twenty-five years old, who was doing a term of six months for highway robbery, with violence. He had been five years in a reformatory, and was suspected of having been in other gaols many times for petty theft. He also brought a detestable character from the army, from whose ranks he was now expelled, by the fact of his conviction. The very face of the fellow—his squab nose, square jaw, and impudent eyes, showed that he must, in his nature, be indifferent to ordinary means of coercion.

As it was seen that "C. 1. 12" had not begun his dinner, the Admiral suggested that he should at once be brought into the "justice-room;" Mr. Armstrong concurred, and said to Michael:

"You are going to see now how we manage prisoners who won't be tamed by moral suasion. I hope you will help us to make these examples scarcer than they were in Mr. Jabbot's time."

CHAPTER V.

A MALE RUFFIAN AND A FEMALE FIEND.

THEY entered the justices' room, which was a bare apartment, with a large fire. Mr. Fidler, the clerk of the peace, a fat, fussy gentleman with spectacles, who generally attended on "visiting days," sat at a table examining prison accounts, and wheezed in so doing. He made way for the magistrates, who both seated them-

selves, while Michael took his stand near the mantel-shelf. Admiral Woodstock drew out a portentous horn snuff-box, and offered his colleague a pinch of rappee, repeating that it was high time to make an example.

The prisoner was introduced by a warder, and stood in the middle of the room, with a cool air, and an evident disposition to make light of his predicament. Mr. Fidler took a Testament, and administered the judicial oath to Captain Keyser.

"This man's name is Thomas Piper," began the governor in a bashful manner. "He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment at the summer assizes, and from the moment of his arrival in this prison his conduct has been very bad. Last month I reported him to your worships, and he was punished by a fortnight's confinement in the refractory cells. He had previously been put for a week in the refractory cells, and had further been punished at various times by me, with terms varying from one to three days' confinement. On Friday last he was reported to me for having refused to pick his oakum, and I ordered him into solitary confinement upon punishment diet, for the day following. On Monday he refused either to go on the tread-wheel or to pick his oakum, and on being remonstrated with by a warder, threw his mess-tin at that officer's head. I was thereupon sent for, and he called me an old fool . . ."

"That's a lie, now—it was the warder I called an old fool, not you," interrupted Mr. Thomas Piper.

"He used other abusive language besides," continued Captain Keyser, making a spasmodic effort to wriggle out of his shirt. "I believe he compared me to a bag of bones."

The warder was next sworn, and deposed that the mess-tin would certainly have struck his head but for something that had stood in the way. He considered "C. 1. 12" as an unmanageable character. He had seldom seen such a one.

"What have you to say in your defence, Piper?" inquired Mr. Armstrong, who being of senior standing as magistrate acted as chairman.

"Vy, I've got to say this, that a cove can't work if you takes his vittles from him," answered the prisoner doggedly. "You're sent down to them dark cells, where you gets bread and water and 'skilley.' And when you're that weak that you can't hardly stand, then they takes you out and tells you to go on the wheel agin. I aint a-goin' to do it—not until I've 'ad vittles enough to set me up in flesh and blood agin—that I aint."

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Mr. Armstrong.

"Gi'e us a chance, yer honour," whined "C. 1. 12," as if he suddenly perceived that the expression on the Bench's features was not reassuring.

The magistrates laid their heads together, and whispered for a moment.

"You seem to have flattered yourself that your obstinacy could set us at defiance, and we must teach you the contrary," said Mr. Armstrong. "The dark cells do not correct you, nor does bread and water diet. Our sentence on you is, that you receive twenty lashes with the instrument called the 'cat.'"

The prisoner turned livid. He half-opened his mouth to speak, but words would not come out.

"Take him away," added Mr. Armstrong; and the warder hustled the man out before he could find a word to say against a sentence which had clearly filled him with the greatest surprise and terror.

Up to this moment Michael had not opened his lips. He had seen and heard so much to amaze him in his walk round the gaol that he felt the ways of prisoners to be, for the present, things beyond his ken. As to "C. 1. 12" he was obviously a hardened man, whom it was necessary to subdue; nor had Michael any squeamish objections to flogging, feeling, indeed, that corporal punishment may be a merciful means of reforming a man who can be influenced by no other methods. Nevertheless, he could not help regretting that he had not had the chance of trying his hand upon Thomas Piper before this sharp crisis in the latter's affairs; and he recoiled when Mr. Armstrong actually proposed that he should witness the execution of the sentence:

"If the doctor is in the prison we will have the man flogged at once—the punishment has double effect when administered quick and hot after the offence," remarked the young magistrate. "The Admiral and I will go and see it done, and you will learn something if you come too, Christy."

"No, thank you," answered the chaplain, with a little shiver.

"I don't suggest you should come out of mere curiosity, you know. But if you have never seen the 'cat' applied you won't be so persuasive in warning men against it, as if the recollection of its ravages were vividly impressed on you."

"I used to say that a ship's chaplain could never be truly eloquent about drunkenness unless he had been drunk once or twice himself," chimed in the Admiral, whose aphorisms were often more blunt than to the point.

"I will go and see the instrument and the preparations for the

punishment, but I would rather not stay to see it inflicted," said Michael. "Whether I made an exhibition of myself from nervousness, or bore the sight calmly, the prisoner would, I suspect, think equally the worse of me for having looked on."

"As you please," replied Mr. Armstrong cheerily. "Remember, though, that in a few months you will have to see a man hanged, and attend him on to the drop, so you can't school your nerves too soon. H'm, it's nearly one—the doctor's usual hour for coming—he ought to be here by this time."

"I think I hear his bell," muttered Captain Keyser, "I will go out and see."

Before the governor returned with Dr. Hardy, the latter had been to see "C. 1. 12" in his cell, had felt his pulse, and pronounced him fit to be whipped; he had likewise visited the small plum-filcher, Harry Nokes, and had formed a similarly favourable estimate of his powers of endurance. Dr. Hardy was a short thick-set man, with a smooth-shaven face and a gray head round as a cannon-ball. He was a fairly able practitioner, fond of jokes and succulent food, a radical, a sceptic, and a pitiless scoffer at the departed Mr. Jabbot, whom he persisted in regarding as a typical specimen of the priest "all the world over." He was continually threatening to resign his prison appointment for the trouble it gave him, but kept it all the same, because the histories of prisoners furnished him with an inexhaustible stock of anecdotes wherewith he regaled dinner-tables, and enlivened the sick couches of the county ladies whom he attended. Mr. Armstrong made Michael and the doctor acquainted with each other, but when the latter heard that it had been proposed to let the chaplain view the flogging, he demurred:

"Pooh, pooh, it would upset him for a week. My dear sir, you're a lymphatico-nervous temperament, and would bear that sort of thing better on your own back than on another man's."

"I wish you would pay me that compliment, doctor," laughed Mr. Armstrong.

"I don't though—you're lymphatico-sanguine, Armstrong, and the 'cat' would make you hollar."

"And how will C. 1. 12 bear it?" asked the magistrate, amused.

"Oh, he'll roar like a bull, but it won't harm him."

Impossible to imagine livelier gentlemen than three out of the party of five who were going to see a fellow-creature's back cut to shreds. Michael followed in the rear with Captain Keyser, who shrugged, and plucked at his wristbands as if there were a burr working itself up his sleeve. Mr. Fidler remained in the justice-room to resume his inspection of accounts and his wheezing.

The party descended a stone staircase in C. 1. ward, and reached the under-ground regions, where stood the bath-rooms, the refractory cells (like the ordinary ones, but pitch-dark), the kitchen and store-rooms. In an obscure vaulted space, which formed a largish square, surrounded by the black doors of the six dark cells and of three other light but padded ones, for lunatics and prisoners who were brought in obstreperously drunk, rose a whipping-post on the well-known mediæval model. It consisted of a post, crossed at five feet or more above the ground by a plank with a movable top, pierced by two semi-circular holes, which adapted themselves to corresponding semi-circles in the lowermost half, and could thus imprison the wrists of a victim. From both sides of the post, lower down, there jutted iron rings provided with straps to secure the waist and ankles; but these were not often used. The place was dimly lighted by air-holes, but in the gloom could be descried a broad movable ladder-staircase, lying along with a couple of large black unhinged doors (for so they appeared to be), and a thick black beam, against the wall opposite the whipping-post. Mr. Armstrong nudged Michael, and said:—"That's the hangman's paraphernalia—the beam and drop that form the gallows."

It needed no such intimation to make the chaplain's flesh creep and his pulses throb. The semi-obscurity, the arches of the vault, the frowning cell-doors, the ugly pillory, all recalled an ancient chamber of torture; nor was the impression lessened when Thresher, the reception-warder whom Michael had seen in the morning—a herculean fellow with a bushy red beard,—appeared in his shirt-sleeves, with an enormous birch rod in one hand and a long round tin case in the other. Mr. Armstrong took the case from him, opened it, and drew out an implement fit to make the blood curdle. It consisted of a round wooden handle, two feet long, and of nine forty-inch tails of plaited whipcord, each tapered off by a five-inch leather thong, knotted. There were nine knots to every tail, so that a shower of eighty-one "blood suckers" would fall upon a patient's back at the infliction of every stroke.

The mere sight of it was enough for Michael, who begged leave to retire, and darted up-stairs, crossing on his way Harry Nokes, who was being dragged down by the collar of his jacket, his heels scraping the ground, and his tongue uttering yelps of protest and consternation. The fancier of other people's plums was not admitted to the honours of the whipping-post. He was simply laid across a small deal table, where two warders held him down, while the stalwart Thresher belaboured his nude nether parts with twelve resounding, swishing thwacks. Harry Nokes's manner of comport-

ing himself under the infliction would have filled an Eton boy with disgust and indignation. He squealed, wriggled, tried to put his hands behind him, and, finding resistance useless, gave vent to a series of shrill yells like those of a sucking-pig in death throes. When the full measure of pain had been allotted to him, he was released, to find his way up to his cell as he pleased; and shambled off, sobbing and adjusting his garments. The Admiral was immensely tickled, and the warders grinned from ear to ear.

But the punishment of C. 1. 12 was a sterner business, and nobody felt inclined to smile when the hang-dog rogue was led in. He was sickly pale, but had seemingly made up his mind not to play the coward; and he obeyed the order to take off his coat and shirt with an assumed air of bravado, softly whistling between his teeth. When he was bare to the waist, Dr. Hardy felt his pulse; and at this moment, when there seemed a faint possibility of respite, a wistful expression passed over the man's features as he caught sight of Thresher, who was combing out the tails of the "cat" with his fingers. However, Dr. Hardy made a sign to the two warders, the prisoner was led up to the post, and in a moment his wrists were fast set.

The spectators could not but hold their breath and wince, as Thresher took his stand a yard behind the post with his feet well apart, and swung his arm for the first stroke. A moment like the twinkling of an eye, then the tails hissed in the air, and fell with a ghastly splashing sound on the naked flesh. The victim bounded and arched up his back as if he had a hump; but the second lash drove him gasping with his chest against the post, where he remained during the next two strokes, grinding between his teeth a piece of leather which he had put in his mouth to keep him from shouting. At the fifth lash he could bear it no longer, and uttered a roar like a maddened buffalo's. The operator's arm was now in full swing, and the prisoner's back presented a net-work of fiery purple weals. He must have been more than mortal man who could have borne the excruciating agony of such terrific blows without fainting or crying out. In his desperate struggles to free his wrists, the prisoner thumped his shoulders against the cross-board, kicked out and danced, bellowing all the while curses and blasphemies that were awful to hear; but gradually these died out, for a foam of anguish had gathered upon his lips, and he had only strength left to sob out inarticulate "Ohs." At the twelfth blow rivulets of blood were trickling down the man's back; at the fifteenth, little strips of his flesh were scattered about the place, and one flew on to Mr. Armstrong's shirt-front when the twentieth

lash had been given, the executioner coolly shook out from his implement a spray of blood drops, the ends of all the tails being as red as if they had been dipped in the bucket of a slaughter-house.

It was necessary to hold up the prisoner when he was cast loose, for he was well-nigh fainting. A shirt was hurriedly thrown over his shoulders, and he staggered out between his supporters, weak as a crying child—and with every atom of spirit thrashed out of him.

Michael Christy, who was waiting for the magistrates under the dome, had heard the man's fearful howls, and he caught sight of him as he was being led back to his cell. He never forgot the degrading spectacle; and it impressed an indelible lesson on his mind. If, thought he, a human being can be thus reduced by a few blows from the extreme of dogged insolence to the opposite extremity of abject helplessness, surely God had armed man with some weapon by which the soul also can be chastened from the brutishness of sin into the submission of penitence—better than the corporal submission to pain, because more lasting. He thought of the text which describes the weapon entrusted to God's chosen ministers:—“*And I will put a two-edged sword into their hands.*”

The magistrates came up looking quite composed, but, noticing Michael's evident distress of mind, they made no allusion to what had occurred. They said they would visit the female wing, before investigating the gas and potato grievances; and a move was accordingly made towards an edifice standing apart from the men's gaol, though connected with it by a long passage. Upon reaching the door they rang a bell, for not even the governor must enter the female wing without ringing. The summons was answered by a tall, red-haired, and plain-featured Scotch girl, who was the female warder, and generally addressed as Miss MacCraik. She belonged to the class from which ladies'-maids are mostly drawn, but dressed above her condition, and spoke with a laudable ambition to make her *h's* fit into places where gentlefolks are wont to put them. If her efforts were not invariably successful, her native brogue prevented failure from being so conspicuous as it might have been in the case of a Southron maiden who cannot bring an opportune “*eh, noo,*” to the rescue of a doubtful aspirate.

In regard of cells and general appearance the women's wing was like the men's, but a very unexpected scene greeted Michael—nothing less than a baby boy, about two years old, who lay sprawling and crowing upon a couple of mattresses placed across the floor of the ward for his convenience. “Baby Dick” was already an old inmate of the prison, for he had lived there fifteen months. He was the son of a young woman who had been but eighteen years old

when he was born, and who was now undergoing a sentence of two years for being accessory to a burglary. Ignorant of his mother's crimes, and of the life of infamy that was probably reserved for himself, the little fellow toddled about where he listed, and was a favourite with everybody. It was by no special favour that he had been admitted to the gaol, for women having children under the age of two years are allowed to take them into confinement with them.

The magistrates and the doctor all had a caress for young Dick ; then Mrs. Baillie came out of her room, spruce and smiling, to do the honours of her dreary little realm. Of the twelve tried prisoners in her charge, eight were busy washing the male prisoners' linen, in a laundry fitted up with the inevitable boxes to prevent contact. The four others were ironing in their cells. The inspection of them was soon over, for not one had a complaint to make. Mrs. Baillie was an admirable ruler, who kept a sharp eye on all matters which might give rise to grievances ; and suffered neither ill-cooked food nor defective gas-pipes to annoy her subjects.

But a thirteenth prisoner now remained to be visited, and she was the notorious Margaret Field, whom Mr. Jabbot believed to be possessed of a devil. Her crime had been the subject of newspaper comment for weeks, and had caused the profoundest sensation throughout the county of Eastshire, both because of its barbarity and the high rank of the victim, and because of the lamentable consequences that had resulted from it. The beautiful Miss Graham of Fairdale Park, the belle of the county, and the richest heiress in it, had been waylaid by her on the very eve of her intended marriage with Colonel Forester, and struck upon the eyes with a white-hot iron, the result being a total destruction of the poor girl's sight. Mr. Armstrong said to Michael as they walked towards cell 15 :— "There never was an outrage so dastardly. Miss Graham was one of the most charming, sweet-tempered creatures you could imagine, and even now she bears her misfortune with the resignation of a saint."

"The prisoner is very poorly," muttered the doctor, who had been talking to Mrs. Baillie. "I put her on light diet, thinking it might tempt her to eat, but I must prescribe wine and tonics if she continues to starve herself."

"Do, by all means," said Mr. Armstrong ; "she mustn't be suffered to cheat the punishment she so richly deserves. The gallows would be too good for her."

"But is it so certain that she intended to strike Miss Graham ?" asked Michael. "If I remember rightly she denied it before the magistrates."

"The mob were hooting outside the court, and all the women of Fairdale parish had come down to stone her," replied Mr. Armstrong. "It was only with the utmost difficulty the police could protect her on her way to and from the prison, and I myself had to make the mob a speech to save her from being lynched. No wonder she denied when she found herself exposed to universal execration, after hoping, as she evidently had done, to stir up popular sympathy in her favour by a cock and bull story of seduction and betrayal. Why, the whole thing was premeditated. She lay in wait for Miss Graham at old Mardle's forge, and, when arrested, swore that Colonel Forester,—whom she called Captain Field—was her lawful husband by a Scotch marriage. I know Forester intimately, and he's quite incapable of anything in the melodramatic Lothario way. Besides, the girl told a heap of other lies. All the information she gave about her own antecedents turned out to be false, and her behaviour in this place has been villainous."

"I believe she is half-cracked," said Admiral Woodstock. "I knew a girl at Plymouth who swore the Port-admiral was her husband, and pursued him through the streets with a saucepan, because he was going to marry a widow with money. Just a similar case, egad!"

"It's a very mysterious matter," was all that Michael felt called upon to answer; and at this point Mrs. Baillie turned her key in Fifteen's lock, and ordered the inmate of the cell to come out.

The doorway was instantly darkened by the slight figure of a weary young woman, who might have been any age between twenty and thirty. She wore a shabby black silk dress, and her dark hair fell in a tangled uncombed mass about her forehead and shoulders. Whether she had ever possessed good looks it was difficult to say. For the present her complexion was of a sallow pallor, and her large eyes gleamed with a wild brightness which came from fever or madness.

The magistrates had halted at a short distance from her door, and Mr. Armstrong asked coldly whether she had any complaint to utter? She returned no answer, but gazed a moment at the floor, then raised her eyes sullenly to reconnoitre the faces of the four men. Abruptly she gave a start, made two steps forward, and fixed her glance on Michael Christy with an amazement utterly indescribable in its searching intensity.

"Who are you?" she inquired, huskily and sharp.

"My name is Christy," replied Michael, taken aback, and reddening. "I am the new chaplain of the prison."

"Take off your hat, please," she said in a voice that had far more the tone of a threat than of a prayer.

Michael did as requested, and stood with his head uncovered in the full light of a grated window. Margaret Field advanced a step nearer as if she were going to make a spring.

"That's the face," she exclaimed, pointing her finger at him. "Whoever the man may be he's a relation of yours. Have you a brother who ever went by the name of Moore?"

"I have a brother, but his name is not Moore." Saying which, Michael was quite crimson.

"And he is an officer in the army?"

"He is," answered Michael, whose heart for a moment ceased to beat.

"Then he's the man," screamed the prisoner with intense excitement. "He was one of the witnesses to my marriage, and could prove my innocence. Thank God, I have traced him at last! But it's your brother who is the cause of my being here! He is a villain!"

CHAPTER VI.

MARGARET'S OWN VERSION.

SUCH a scene was naturally calculated to arouse the astonishment of spectators in the highest degree. Michael stood like one petrified.

"What makes you think you have known my brother?" he asked.

"I am sure of it. There could be no such coincidence of features outside a family; and I repeat your brother is a scoundrel."

"You call everybody scoundrels," grunted Admiral Woodstock.

"Nobody spoke to you," retorted Margaret Field sharply. "I have no complaint to make, so you may leave me. I was speaking to the chaplain."

"Don't you be saucy, young woman," said the Admiral, as if he were addressing a ship's boy on quarter-deck.

"Tush! the woman's mad; don't pay any attention to her," said Mr. Armstrong, and he drew Michael away by the arm.

"Go inside your cell, Fifteen," ordered Mrs. Baillie. The prisoner threw a defiant look round but obeyed, and the matron locked the door. "Fifteen is getting worse and worse," she remarked.

Michael returned with the magistrates to the justice room. He was agitated, as may be imagined ; but they told him not to attach any weight to the words of a woman who was clearly out of her mind. It was her craze to get up scenes with everybody. Perhaps she had seen Captain Christy once in her life, and now mixed him up with her imaginary grievances, or perhaps she had merely made a random guess, and wanted to plague the new chaplain. Michael said nothing, but resolved to go back by-and-by, and question Margaret till he discovered whether her very serious statements had any ground of truth in them. He had every faith in his brother's honour, but little in his discretion ; and he trembled to think that, through some escapade, Frank might have been instrumental in bringing this woman to her present wretched position. "What an adventure to begin my new life with," thought he ; and was secretly glad that the magistrates, the governor, and Dr. Hardy, all made so light of Margaret Field's utterances, which, if true, might place him and his brother in a painful predicament. The doctor talked of cracked women as creatures to whose malicious ingenuity in causing annoyance there were no limits.

It was one o'clock. The magistrates and the doctor went away, and Michael had to dismiss his pre-occupation for the present, for the governor led him off to lunch. They crossed the prison-yard, and entered Captain Keyser's house by a hind door. A prisoner, who was a painter by trade, was at work on a ladder in the hall, within eye-shot of the silver forks on the parlour table, and close to the front-door, which led to liberty. "Quite an honest man," whispered the governor, in explanation, "but gets drunk and riotous several times a year, and comes here for a month."

Michael subsequently learned that several prisoners were employed like that man in work that was not strictly speaking prison labour. Mr. Jabbot used always to charter some literate one as his secretary. Mrs. Keyser had her gowns made by any women who were good at sewing ; Miss Clarinda Keyser sent in her French exercises to be corrected by a native of Gaul who was undergoing two years for manslaughter, which was cheaper than having a master. Some of these details were imparted by the governor's wife at luncheon, whilst her silent husband was carving a veal pie.

Mrs. Keyser was a round little woman, with a red face ; Miss Keyser resembled her father, being tall and thin, with pale hair, and eyelashes almost white.

They were good people who got on well together from being dissimilar in their characters. Mrs. Keyser talked much and fast, but was very practical, and knew all the uses to which prisoners

could be put. She bought nothing but eatables and gloves, for everything else could be made in the prison. The boots she wore were of prison make, and as nice as any to be had in London. The brackets in the drawing-room, the picture-frames, the clock in the library, Clarinda's sleeve solitaires in carved ivory, and the Captain's shepherd's plaid trousers, were all the work of captive hands. There were a number of books waiting to be bound until a bookbinder should get into trouble, which would happen soon or late, for every trade sent representatives to the prison. It was a parliament of all the rogues and all the talents.

Miss Clarinda, aged twenty-two, and languid, inclined to the more romantic aspects of prison life. She felt sympathy for the Frenchman who corrected her exercises and wrote hints for pronunciation on the margin. She was sure that many of the prisoners had been condemned unjustly; some of the young and dark-eyed ones especially. She had an album containing photographs of men who had been hanged, and some of their writings. A man who had killed his wife was very clever at etchings, and she had kept three of his which she would never part with. Did Mr. Christy like etchings?

Michael, though much perturbed by what had just happened, made himself as civil as possible, and created a favourable impression. Mrs. Keyser laughed to hear he was not married, and the languid Miss Clarinda blushed. Should he not feel very lonely in that fifteen-room house? Mr. Jabbot had left an old Irish housemaid behind—a perfect guy, and not at all the sort of servant for Mr. Christy. Mrs. Keyser suggested that Michael would find the chaplain's house horribly dirty, and had better come and stay with them till it had had a thorough mopping. He should have a capital bed-room with a southern aspect, and a cheerful view of the world-famed Eastshire hills. Intrusion? Nonsense! it would be no intrusion; they would be delighted of his company, and Clarinda should play to him of an evening, if he liked music. Or if he preferred chess, the Captain was a first-rate chess-player, and would be glad to get a better adversary than Mr. Jabbot, who had never learned to avoid fool's mate. "Don't say no," pleaded Captain Keyser, in his solemn way. These were the only words he spoke during luncheon.

Michael accepted the invitation, which relieved him of some trouble in settling down; and so it was arranged he should return to tea. After all, the "luncheon" turned out to be a mid-day dinner, which Mrs. Keyser owned with the slight embarrassment usual to persons who think there is a gentility in dining at one

hour rather than at another. Michael confessed, however, that he liked tea, and a ten o'clock supper above all things, and thereby made matters pleasant. He rose from table when Captain Keyser did, and returned with him to the prison; but instead of betaking himself to the reading of prisoners' letters, he repaired at once to the female wing, for he wished to get his mind clear about Margaret Field's statement before applying himself to any other business. The uncertainty which he felt was too disquieting to be endured.

Mrs. Baillie admitted him to her wards, and he told her that he was come to have a talk with Fifteen. She conducted him to the cell, and obligingly offered to place two chairs in the ward, so that he might speak with the prisoner in quasi-privacy. It has been remarked that the Prison Act prohibits the chaplain from holding interviews with female prisoners except under the eye of a matron or warder; but this enactment (and a necessary one it is) does not oblige the matron to be within actual ear-shot. All that the law requires is, that the chaplain shall not be at liberty to closet himself in a female prisoner's cell; but so long as the proprieties are not violated the spirit of the law is observed. Thus in a few minutes Michael and Margaret were seated close to the mattresses where baby Dick was sprawling, and in full view of Mrs. Baillie and Miss MacCraik, as they moved about on their linen duties.

Margaret's eyes flashed on seeing the chaplain return, but she seemed neither pleased nor the reverse at being called out for a talk, greatly as that boon is valued by the generality of prisoners. The momentary emotion she had exhibited on recognizing the chaplain's features had quickly died out; and, during Michael's short absence, she had relapsed into her habitual moodiness. She was indifferent to the state of her hair, of her dress, of her unwashed hands; she sat and stared with a gaze which had nothing of benevolence in it. At times she chuckled to herself absently.

Michael had taken off his hat, and began in a tone which he rendered as soothing as he could.

"I have come to ask if you will tell me your history, Mrs. Field."

"That's the first time I've been spoken to in that way since I came here," she said with a sneer.

"I fancy that is because you received Mr. Jabbot as if his visits were unwelcome."

"Mr. Jabbot told you that, did he? No doubt he forgot to add that I was brought here half dead from the violence of the people,

who wanted to hang me to a lamp-post, and he chose that moment for coming to upbraid me for my sinfulness, and advise me to prepare for the life-long expiation I had merited. I ordered him to leave me. What did he know about my sinfulness or the expiation I deserved? I suppose, though, you are like the others, and believe that I blinded that young lady on purpose?"

"I can have no opinion in the matter until I have heard your own version of the facts."

"Well, I didn't do it on purpose, then, if that will satisfy you," said Margaret, impetuously. "I had gone to Fairdale to seek Colonel Forester, who is my husband, and to tell him that he had no right to marry another woman so long as I was alive. I produced the certificate of our marriage; and he tried to take it from me. He wrenched my arm round so that it hurt me for weeks afterwards. I ran away, and was followed by him into a blacksmith's forge, where I caught up a pair of tongs to keep him at a distance. It was then that Miss Graham started up between us. She wore a riding-habit and tall hat, so that, in my confusion, I mistook her for a man who was come to join in the assault against me, and, before I could detect my error, I had struck out in self-defence, not meaning to hit my aggressor's face, but his hat: and it was through Miss Graham's own fault that the blow fell on her eyes. That is how it all happened. I am very sorry, but I only acted as any other defenceless woman would have done, in protecting her honour against a cowardly attack."

"And what became of your marriage certificate?"

"It was taken from me. I don't know by whom, for I fainted when I saw what I had done, and, upon recovering consciousness, I was in the custody of the police. From that moment to this I have been treated like a murderess. Nobody has given me a word of pity, or believed what I alleged in my defence. I have undergone every sort of injustice and cruelty."

"Yet you told your story before the examining magistrates, I presume?" asked Michael.

"I did: but what could the words of an accused woman avail against a host of perjured witnesses? Colonel Forester swore that he had never seen me in his life before. I did not suppose a man would have told such a lie upon oath without being struck dead on the spot. Then the blacksmith's apprentice deposed that I had made a deliberate attempt to kill the Colonel, and that when Miss Graham had interposed to save him I had cried:—'I'll spoil your beauty for you'—which was a thing I never did say. Miss Graham's groom gave a similar account of the affair; and there were

two lawyers who brought out all this evidence with telling force. I had no counsel to assist me."

"Was Miss Graham herself cited as a witness?"

"No, but her depositions were taken before magistrates by her bedside, and they went against me, for she had not witnessed the interview between my husband and me. She was out riding with her groom, and on the way her horse cast a shoe. That accounts for her having been in the forge when Captain Field and I rushed in—to her great surprise, as she said—and that is all she remembers, for not a minute elapsed between our entrance and that unhappy blow which stunned and blinded her."

"I remark that you call Colonel Forester 'Field.' Is that the name by which he was married to you?" inquired Michael.

"Yes; Captain Henry Raymond Field, of the Royal Artillery," replied Margaret, quivering with agitation. "When we first became acquainted I looked into the Army List, and found that there was an officer of that name in the Artillery, so I believed it to be true. I believed everything he told me then; but before the magistrates the mistake also turned against me, and so did my calling my husband's valet as a witness. The fact-is, that besides your brother, who styled himself 'Lieutenant Moore of the Marines,' there was a Frenchman who witnessed our marriage,—one Robert Dubois, whom my husband had stated was his valet; but when I called Colonel Forester's valet into the witness-box, an Englishman appeared, who was able to prove that he had been ten years in his master's service, and had never left him for more than a week at a time. I tell you perjury faced me at every turn—perjury most infamous and foul."

"One question more," said Michael, gravely, for he felt much troubled; "Can you recall anything besides the resemblance of feature—which may be merely accidental—to prove that your Lieutenant Moore is my brother?"

"Was your brother quartered at Woolwich three years ago?" asked Margaret Field, vehemently. "Had he a bull-dog called 'Wasp'? Did he wear upon his watch-guard, and enclosed in a net-work of gold wire, a rifle bullet which had wounded him in the Chinese war? Is he very fond of boasting about his brother 'Mike,' who was a famous cricketer at Oxford? Was he bred in Lincolnshire? Was he at Eton? Is his uncle a baronet?"

To this voluble flow of interrogatories Michael replied by staring, but he was not skilled in the art of deception, and when Margaret paused he murmured:—"Yes, that is my brother Frank."

"Ah, you see it is!" she ejaculated with a shrug; "and a pretty

gentleman he is, your brother ! He must have read in the newspapers of the charge hanging over me, yet he never came forward to say that I was not a murderess, but a woman who had been abominably wronged."

Michael bowed his head, and his face was pitiable to see.

That his brother should have wilfully connived in a felony both odious and heartless—that he should have shrunk from coming forward to support the defence of a woman of whose innocence he must have felt sure—was not credible. There must be some mystery in this. But what mystery ? . . .

As often happens when one's suspicions are aroused, a number of side lights broke upon the chaplain's mind, bringing corroboration to Margaret's narrative. Michael recollected that three years ago Frank had gone on a tour to Scotland ; and now he came to think of it, Frank's best chum for years past had been an officer named Forester. The brothers did not know much of each other's friends, for they had not been at the same school ; but Michael thought he recollected having seen Forester, and was positive he had often heard his name mentioned. Moreover, it was a striking circumstance that when Michael had written to inform Frank that he was competing for the Tolminster chaplaincy, the dragoon had written in a tone of unwonted deprecation, using querulous language to blame what he called a foolish scheme. On the other hand, the brothers had met in London since the perpetration of Margaret Field's crime, and Frank had not said a word about the "Eastshire assault case." He was as gay as usual. No hint came from him that the Colonel Forester who was Miss Graham's betrothed was the same Forester who had been his companion at Eton and in the army.

Margaret watched the lines of uneasiness deepening on the chaplain's face, and, consistently with the distempered state of her mind, she misread them.

"I'll be bound you are repenting of having confessed the truth about your brother," she said tauntingly. "You will find yourself obliged to choose now between abandoning me to my fate, or drawing your brother and his friend into a mess ; and no doubt you will decide that a friendless woman's life is not worth two gay gentlemen's reputations ?"

Michael was shocked at this.

"You are mistaken. If what you told me be true, I will see you righted," he said simply. "Meantime, let me ask you to confide me some particulars of your history previous to your marriage. They may be useful in assisting me to help you."

"They are not necessary to my defence," answered Margaret

curtly. "When I eloped with my husband I wrote to my father that I was going to America, and he thinks I am there now."

"Your parents are alive, then?"

"Yes. I may tell you that much, but I shall not say any more. I would rather die than suffer the humiliation of allowing them to see me in such a plight as this."

"But they might be able to help you."

"No; *you* can help me, it seems; but nobody else can." She said this in a contemptuous tone, as if it were indifferent to her whether she was helped or not. Michael was the more hurt.

"I will help you, Mrs. Field," he answered earnestly. "If your statements be true, your character must be cleared, and you shall leave this place followed by the sympathy of all who hear how cruelly you have been used. I can say no more for the present. Good-day."

He rose, and slightly bowed to her, then walked away down the ward. Half-way he was stopped by Baby Dick, who had been very good all through the interview, but had now rambled off the mattresses, and was stretching out his chubby little arms to be lifted up for a ride. Michael stooped to pat his cheeks, and in so doing turned and saw Margaret gazing after him with a deep look, speechless and wistful.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE FEMALE WING.

THE matron's curiosity had been pricked by Fifteen's recognition of Mr. Christy's face (a handsome face, thought she), and she stopped him on his way to the door, hoping to have a talk. But he was in no mood for a chat, and walked out hastily. Mrs. Baillie saw that he was upset.

She went to double-lock Fifteen's door, and found her walking round her disorderly cell like a cat in a cage; but she put her no questions, for between her and this prisoner there was war. Margaret would have told her to mind her own business. Mrs. Baillie had to curb her inquisitiveness till the morrow, when she saw the new chaplain again. He came into her wing with a list in his hand, desiring to see the female prisoners one by one.

When Mrs. Baillie invited him into her parlour. "You will find it more comfortable than standing in the passage, Mr. Christy."

"But I don't wish to disturb your occupations."

"Oh, this is the hour when I give out the starch and blue for the laundry. By the way, you will not need to send out your linen to any washerwoman in the town; it can all be done here by the prisoners."

"Is that one of my privileges?"

"Well, I don't know whether it is written in the law;" and the matron laughed. "All the officials avail themselves as much as possible of the prisoners' services; and I take care that shirts are always sent back with their buttons sewn on."

"And not iron-moulded, I suppose?"

"Iron-moulding would be a bread and water affair, for I should treat it as wilful neglect of work. Step in, please; there is a cozy fire, you see."

The matron's parlour was contrived by throwing two ordinary cells into one. The narrow windows were grated and the walls whitewashed; but there was a fire-place, and in other respects the room was fitted up like a civilized parlour, and replete with many an elegance, even to a cottage piano. Mrs. Baillie alluded to this unexpected ornament, and confessed that the magistrates viewed it with an evil eye, requiring of her that she should only play upon it when the prisoners were in the distant washing-room or at exercise, where there was less chance of their being enlivened by its strains. But she broke off from this vein of pleasantry upon noticing how pinched was the chaplain's countenance, and how absent he looked.

"I am afraid that unhappy Fifteen annoyed you yesterday, Mr. Christy," she said, fixing her grey blue eyes upon him with a gleam of interest.

"She distressed, not annoyed me; but it was not her fault, poor creature."

"And do you believe anything of what she said?"

"I don't know, I am sure. What she said was very strange."

"And unlikely, I should think. I knew your brother very well, Mr. Christy. My poor husband was an officer."

"So Mr. Jabbot told me. In the Hussars, I think?"

"Yes, but we were once at Aldershot with the 12th Dragoons. Those were happy times!" There Mrs. Baillie heaved a sigh. "I little thought then that I should ever be reduced to prison work. It was Lord Eastshire's kindness that procured me this situation."

"I hope you don't find the work beyond your strength?" said Michael.

"No, but it is very trying, and women prisoners are the most vexatious creatures it is possible to imagine. I have to be always on my guard against their tricks, and if I did not punish them for the slightest thing, I should never be obeyed. That Fifteen, for instance, is dreadful, the punishment cells have no effect upon her."

"Do you mean that you punish an untried prisoner?" asked Michael, startled. "Why, what offence can she commit?"

"Refuses now and then to wash the floor of her cell, and furbish her brasses," replied the matron, coolly. "I don't say it is just that untried prisoners should have such work to do, but I have to enforce the law as it stands. Then she gives impudent answers, which is contrary to discipline."

The chaplain was amazed at this, and vexed. He approached the fire and listened to Mrs. Baillie's account of what an untried prisoner was expected to do. This included every description of menial service that was likely to revolt a person of lady-like training, and it seemed monstrous to Michael that such indignities could be put upon prisoners who might be innocent, and were at all events presumably so. He learned, however, that prisoners who had money could purchase exemption from a great deal by privately feeding the wardress—which though irregular was customary—and could also have their food brought from a tavern out of doors. As to Fifteen, the doctor had recently ordered that she was no more to be punished for anything she said, did, or refused to do, being apparently insane; but since these instructions the prisoner had, with a waywardness habitual to her class, set to work without making any objections.

"So now Mrs. Field scours the floor of her cell?" asked Michael.

"Yes, twice a week. It seems hard, but we must remember that in doing work before trial prisoners serve an apprenticeship for the hard labour which they get afterwards, and which comes then less severe than if they were quite unprepared. Many ask work as a favour: time hangs so heavy on their hands."

"But have they no books, no means of recreation? What does Mrs. Field do to make the time pass?"

"I offered her some shirts to mend to amuse her, but she did the work so ill that I had to withdraw it. There are books of a sort, but Mr. Jabbot allowed the library to fall into decay. We have nothing better than a few odd numbers of the *Sunday at Home*."

"I think it is stated in the 'Chaplain's Instructions,' furnished to me, that I have the power to lend books," observed Michael.

"Oh, yes, sir, you may lend books, and even newspapers, if you please," said Mrs. Baillie; "but," and she smiled in a way Michael hardly liked, "if I might be allowed to express an opinion, I would advise you not to be too kind to prisoners until you have had time to judge what sort of persons they are. I will go and fetch my women by turns, and I think you will soon agree with me that they are creatures upon whom soft methods would be wasted."

Mrs. Baillie did not seem to be a hard woman, but she had grown callous like every one else about the place, except Miss Clarinda Keyser. Michael felt as though he had got into a new world, where the measures of kindness and unkindness were not the same as elsewhere. Everybody spoke as if charity towards gaol inmates consisted in grinding them down by system. The chaplain sat by the fire, and his glance followed Mrs. Baillie as she went out. She was decidedly a very neat person, with her violet merino gown and black silk apron. Her chestnut hair was neatly dressed in coils, her hands were white, her lips moist, her eyes limpid, her step was light. Quite a speckless, faultless person all over.

Presently she returned with one of her charges, and Michael's inspection began.

This first prisoner, whom he questioned, was an old woman who had been two and twenty times in Tolminster gaol. She wore the blue check dress, and her arms, bare from the elbows, were damp from the wash-tub. She hid them under her apron, and kept bobbing curtsies. "Yes, sir," said she, "Perkins was her name, and she had been took a begging. It warn't in her to deny what was truth, but she wasn't a thief, thank God in his mussy. Crusts of bread and such like was what she begged for, and didn't mean harm by any one, though the perlice was hard on poor folks nowadays. Would be thankful for a trifle, sir, because the shilling that would be given her when she went out weren't much to speak of, not in the way of getting meat and drink. Thought if she could get seventeen shillings and sixpence she would lead an honest life for ever afterwards, for the sum would help her back to her county, which was Notts."

"Why, Three, you're begging and telling untruths now," interrupted the matron; "you know as well as possible that this is your county."

"Oh, no, ma'am, Notts is where my parish is," said Three, with calm obstinacy.

Michael could not restrain a smile. Three was led out, and the next prisoner came in.

This was Six, Baby Dick's mother, a young woman who diffused an odour of hot irons, and whose hair stuck out in meshes from under her linen cap. Her voice croaked, and she seemed shy until her baby was alluded to, then she put up her apron and whimpered. There was no getting much information out of her, for she stuck to the statement that "she wasn't bred to this kind of thing, having been trained a French polisher, and always tried to get her living respectable. She never drank, nor kept bad company, nor told lies, nor stole; couldn't make out at all how she had come to be mixed up in a burglary with a gang of professional housebreakers. Her husband was undergoing ten years' penal servitude for that offence, but he wasn't her husband properly speaking, only Dick's father 'in a kind o' way.'"

"Shall you know where to go on leaving here?" inquired Michael.

"I should be very glad for any trifle you could spare, sir," was Six's answer.

They were all disposed to be thankful for trifles. Michael saw eleven more of them, but the first two were types of the rest—the old ones respectful and mendacious, the young ones tearful, and full of self-excuses. There was one, however, who contrasted with the remainder, in being much healthier and more cheerful. She was styled "One," and acted as private servant to the matron and wardress, doing no prison labour, and feeding on the scraps that remained from Mrs Baillie's table. She had merry eyes and a glib-tongue when left to herself, but in the presence of the chaplain thought it needful to assume a dolorous aspect and whining tone, which was not too well acted, and which appeared to make her laugh inwardly. Her name was Barbara, or Barby, Haggit, and she was undergoing eighteen months' imprisonment for infanticide, which the jury had euphemistically treated as concealment of birth.

Mrs. Baillie's manner was softened towards this prisoner, to whom she gave a good character for industry and uprightness in money matters. Barby would not steal a pin. "You foolish girl you, take your handkerchief from your eyes," said the matron; "you know that's all make-believe. Give the chaplain an account of yourself."

"Oh, mum, I feel so ashamed of myself," whimpered "One."
"Yes, sir, I shall be out in three months, now, thank yer," and she curtseyed.

"You must manage not to get into any further trouble," said Michael, kindly. "Are you married?"

"Oh no, sir, I'm a coffee-house waitress. I'll manage to get work

fast enough, I dessay. I'd never have been here but for that sodger who made a fool o' me."

"What has become of him? Will he assist you?"

"Not he. It aint likely. A lot o' good-for-nothings they are, sir, them sodgers. When they've took your wages, and left yer wi' a babby, they goes off a whistlin' . . ."

"That will do, 'One,'" said Mrs. Baillie, with forced gravity. "One" had no desire to prolong the interview, and walked out into the passage, where she had left her broom and dust-pan. "Well, sir, what do you think of my flock?" asked the matron, demurely.

"I hope some of them can be made better than they are," answered Michael, not feeling presumptuous enough to say anything better, and he rose collecting the papers he had spread on the table. "I think I will see Fifteen, now, Mrs. Baillie."

"Very well, sir," and the matron selected the cell key from the bunch which hung by a long steel chain from her girdle. "I believe Fifteen passed a sleepless night, but the wardress told me she was quiet this morning."

"Do you think that 'One' really murdered her child?" asked Michael, following another train of thought.

"Infanticide is not called child-murder by that class of persons," said Mrs. Baillie. "If Barby Haggit had held her babe in her arms for a single hour she would have been incapable of hurting it, for she is very good-hearted. But a little creature who is born only to be an encumbrance is not looked upon as a human being by an unmarried girl. She kills it before it is fairly alive, because if it lived she would not know what to do with it."

"Are these cases frequent?"

"More than frequent, I should say. I should call infanticide almost a custom among the immoral classes of large cities."

They walked down the ward, past the row of drab doors with their black nails, past the shining brass knobs which "One" was polishing with her red elbows bared. When they came to Fifteen's door the matron opened it and withdrew, as she had done the previous day. Margaret Field emerged into the passage.

Michael at once perceived a change in her, for she had washed her hands and face, and dressed her hair properly. There was a corresponding alteration in her manner. It was cold, but not sullen. Evidently the reflection that the new chaplain was interested in her behalf had operated favourably on her.

"I have come to ask whether you wish to add anything to what you told me yesterday, Mrs. Field," said Michael, a little moved without knowing why.

"Nothing, thank you. I should like to be confronted with your brother."

"That is my wish too. My brother's regiment is coming to Tolminster, and the instant he arrives you shall see him. I will only ask you to have patience for about a week."

"I am not impatient. I merely want to have the truth established," said Margaret, rationally.

"This woman can't be mad," thought Michael, and he looked on her from his height. He was so tall that she had to raise her eyes in speaking to him. Their glances met, and she lowered hers without embarrassment. "Should you like some books, Mrs. Field?" was the chaplain's next question. "Readable books I mean, not like those that have been lent you, as I understand."

A faint smile passed over Margaret's face, and she half-turned towards her cell. "I have a book there, but it is in rather sad condition. I should feel obliged if you could let me have some stationery, for I could then write out all I have told you, and you would see if there were any discrepancies."

"You shall have stationery, certainly. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you."

"Pray tell me, if there should be. I am sorry you will not let me correspond with your friends, Mrs. Field; but I hope you fully trust in my readiness to help you."

"You have given me no cause to mistrust you," answered Margaret in her cold way, which had not thawed; and she slightly bent her head in response to the chaplain's parting salutation.

By that bend of the head Margaret Field at once placed herself on the chaplain's level. She was no longer a prisoner whom he could patronize, but a lady whom he felt bound to treat with all consideration. The feeling of this being so grew in him all of a piece as he turned away.

He entered the matron's parlour, and startled that lady, who was, or appeared to be, deep in her accounts.

"Mrs. Baillie, I want to ask you does Mrs. Field need linen, clothes, or anything else that money can procure?"

"She has a box-full of clothes, but, as you saw, she neglects herself shamefully," said the matron, surprised. "As to diet, having no money, she lives on prison fare."

"But she would be entitled to better food if she could pay for it!"

"Yes, if she paid for it."

"Well, then, I wish you would kindly see her catered for," begged Michael, depositing some gold on the table. "When you have spent

that I will give you some more. Perhaps you will let me give the wardress a sovereign, so that she may get Mrs. Field's menial work done for her."

"Very well, sir," answered Mrs. Baillie, more and more surprised, "but there is no need of feeing the wardress. Your order is sufficient."

"Oh, you said it was an established custom, and I do not wish to begin by innovating," said Michael. "Only, Mrs. Baillie, please, I would rather Mrs. Field did not know these trifles came from me. Perhaps you could let her imagine the change in diet was owing to doctor's orders. Dr. Hardy *did* prescribe a change."

The matron promised that these instructions should be obeyed, and the chaplain went away contented.

"That is a bad beginning, though," soliloquised Mrs. Baillie. "If he treats all the prisoners like this they will soon empty his pockets." However, being a prudent matron, addicted to doing as she was told, she picked up the gold and summoned Miss MacCraik, her wardress.

"Bessie, here's a sovereign for you. 'One' will clean Fifteen's cell in future; and you must go out to the 'Running Horse' and tell them to send Fifteen in three good meals every day in future, on the usual terms, seven and sixpence a day, which I will pay every week."

"Aweel! Fefteen hae's found her frands then?" ejaculated the Scotch girl, pocketing the coin.

"Fifteen has found a friend," answered Mrs. Baillie.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE 12TH DRAGOON GUARDS.

MICHAEL CHRISTY had entered upon his chaplaincy at a time when the world was full of noise. It was in October, 1870. For in the past two months war had been raging on the Continent. The Bonaparte dynasty had been expelled from France, and the German armies were gathered round Strasburg, Metz, and the lately imperial Paris. Every day the newspapers teemed with recitals of siege operations and pitched battles, in which discipline and numbers always prevailed over valour and blundering.

A martial wind was blowing over the British Isles, and both the public and the military authorities were inclined to be more critical than at ordinary times on questions affecting regimental proprieties. Else the 12th Dragoons would hardly have been removed to Tolminster for no other crime than that of having rendered themselves disagreeable to some magistrates in the county of Sussex. A brawl by troopers, some high words between the Colonel and the mayor of Brighton, a half-hushed-up scandal in which an alderman's wife and Captain Christy were concerned—no one exactly knew whether it was owing to these or other causes that the bad blood had arisen; but the upshot was that the War Office had decided that the 12th should not spend their winter at Brighton.

They were made welcome at Tolminster, for they were known to be one of the fastest regiments in the service; and Tolminster, like a good cathedral town, was greatly dependent for gaiety on the free-handedness of its garrison. In this respect, the out-going regiment of Lancers had failed to reach that standard of liberality laid down as suitable by provincial tradesmen; and even the young ladies of the gentry had found them a parsimonious set of warriors. They gave no balls, did not sport a drag, and had not even got into debt. Now every officer of the 12th could lay his hand on the breast of his tunic and swear that he had never changed garrisons without leaving some unpaid bills behind. The mess boasted a baronet, the younger son of a duke, two manufacturers' heirs, a squire who had come into his property, a bishop's first-born, and three squires expectant. They were hard riders, drinkers, and gamblers. They could all afford to lose £100 over a rubber, or often did so whether they could afford it or not. Add to this, that they happened to be every one bachelors.

This accounts for the admiration expressed by the Tolminster shop-keepers, and the kind feminine looks bent upon the gallant regiment as it rode up the broad High Street, amid the lively music of its band and the din of the cathedral bells set ringing for the occasion. The men and their chargers were dusty from their long ride, but appeared the more martial for these travel-stains. Their brazen helmets and black horse-hair plumes glittered finely. Their blue tunics with white facings were pronounced more becoming than scarlet; and everybody formed a high opinion of the Colonel, who rode in front, with a drooping grey moustache, and a nose like a large raspberry.

It was half a mile from the town to the barracks, and here a crowd of quidnuncs had collected to see the regiment parade and dismiss. When this formality had been accomplished, the officers

moved off towards their quarters and dismounted. Cigars were lighted, batmen came out of the mess-room with trays, and tankards of claret-cup, and the officers paced about under the windows to stretch their legs after their long day in the saddle. Among this brilliant throng, who excited the envy of civilian eyes, there was one particularly conspicuous by his soldier-like stature and splendid deportment, and this was Captain Frank Christy.

A man may be five foot nothing and a distinguished commander, but there is no denying that the beau-ideal of the cavalry officer is one whose stature equals that of his troopers. Frank Christy could have stood shoulder to shoulder with a Life-guardsmen; but his symmetry of form prevented him from appearing too tall, and in his well-fitting uniform and resplendent helmet he was a figure to be copied into a military tailor's book of fashions. As he seemed to be unaware of his physical perfections the effect of them was more telling. He had a tawny moustache, and blue eyes with a twinkle irresistibly droll. He was evidently the favourite of the mess, for his comrades clustered about him; and, when there was a general gathering round the refreshment-trays, he became the centre of a group which the Colonel joined. There he towered like a chessking among pawns.

"Does anybody know anything of Tolminster?" asked Colonel Buckman, removing a tankard from his ruddy lips, after a long pull.

"Frank does. His brother is chaplain at the county gaol," remarked one of the circle.

"Frank always has friends in good quarters; he 'hedges,' not knowing what may turn up," cut in a small lieutenant named Bool, who was the Bishop's son.

Frank executed a slow wink: "I'll bet you get into 'quod' before me, Dicky."

"Bet you a level hundred I don't," responded little Bool. "Bet you if your crimes and mine were totted up you'd be the first man by many chalks."

"There's a deal of wickedness in little bodies like yours," said Frank. "I think, though, Gayleard beats us all: he's so doosed quiet."

"What's that about me?" asked Lord Harry Gayleard, turning round. He was a handsome slight figure, with muscles of india-rubber.

"Nothing good," replied Bool. "Frank says his brother is going to invite you to tea, to lecture you about your absent morals. By-the-by, Frank, what sort of a fellow is he, your brother—High Church, dry Church, or what?"

"What's the use of asking Frank?" laughed Lord Harry, "he got into a Jew's Synagogue once, thinking it was a Church of England, and sat out the service without discovering his mistake."

"Bool did better," said Frank. "He went and had a dance with the Shakers, and thought he was attending mass."

"Bet there aint such a pious people out as the Shakers," affirmed Dicky Bool. "They dance till all the devil has gone out of 'em. Nothing for piety like being unable to stand upright."

"I wish you and the rest would try it sometimes, you'd save me a world of bother," remarked Colonel Buckman, at which there was general merriment, in which the old chief's guffaw was loudest.

There was an officer present who was not very popular with his comrades. His name was Jarnes, and his nickname Buttery. Nothing was known against him, but he had a trick of saying unpleasant things insidiously.

"I say, Christy, your brother has not written to you as to how that prisoner, Margaret something—the woman in the Fairdale assault business—is getting on, has he?"

"No. Why do you ask?" replied Frank tranquilly.

"Oh, nothing, I merely thought that as your pal, Forester, was mixed up in the business—"

"Forester wasn't mixed up in it."

"What I mean is that Margaret what's-her-name blinded the girl who was to be Forester's wife."

"He's going to marry her all the same, isn't he?" interposed Dicky Bool. "Forester's behaved uncommon well about that, 'pon my soul."

"Yes, and Miss Graham is a charming girl," remarked Lord Harry Gayleard. "I danced with her twice last season, and was awfully cut up when I heard of her accident."

"That woman swears Forester is her husband," proceeded Captain Jarnes.

"She swore to a lie, then," said Frank.

"Rather rum, though, her making such a mistake, wasn't it?"

"Rather rum you should harp on the subject so often as you do, Jarnes," rejoined Frank, nettled, and he turned on his heel.

At this very moment a gentleman in civilian attire was seen to pass out of the ranks of lookers-on, who still loitered on the further side of the barrack-square, and crossed the cricket-lawn in front of the officers' quarters. He walked like one who feels at home within barrack precincts. "Why, there's Forester himself," sang out Dicky Bool, and all the officers made a move across the lawn to greet him. A hum of sympathy rose among them as they did this ;

for over and over again they had talked among themselves as to how this officer's betrothed had been blinded by a savage assault, and how he had remained chivalrously true to her nevertheless, purposing to wed her as soon as she was well enough to be led to church. There was a manliness in this that pleased the dragoon nature.

Philip Forester was a man of middle height, with a pale complexion, black moustache and whiskers, a curved nose finely cut, and dark piercing eyes. He had served in the Guards and on the Staff; but had retired at the period of his expected marriage. He was then two-and-thirty years old, and had left the reputation of an officer of no common merit, who would have been sure to make his mark if he stayed in the service. His manners were those of a perfect gentleman, who has moved in the highest society; quiet, composed, undemonstratively polished.

He lifted his hat to Colonel Buckman, and after distributing shakes of the hand all round, accosted Frank Christy. Their greeting was not that of men who have been accomplices in a crime and secretly hate each other, but that of tried friends who are heartily glad to meet.

"I should have hunted you up to-morrow if you had not come to-day, Phil," said Frank, linking his arm in Philip's, and drawing him aside. "How is Rose Graham?"

"Better, poor thing. I have come by her wish to ask you to drive back to Fairdale and spend the evening."

"I am afraid I can't till after dinner. A couple of the Lancers have stayed behind and are to be our guests, so we must all show at table. Suppose you remain for mess?"

"I'm not presentable in these clothes."

"We'll be glad to have you in any togs, man. The Colonel is sure to ask you."

"Very well, then, but I must have some talk with you at once, Frank. Did you get my letter of Tuesday?"

"No, it must have crossed me. We've been three days on the road. Is anything up?"

"Yes, there is. Madge has recognized your brother by his likeness to you, and she knows your real name now."

"No?"—said Frank, turning pale.

"It's a fact. I have it from Hugh Armstrong, one of the magistrates who was present at the woman's first meeting with your brother. Luckily he and the other justices all think her mad."

"Mike will believe anything I tell him," said Frank, plucking up heart.

"Let's hope he will ; but we shall have to be prudent with our plans now. Let us go up to your rooms. Is this the way ?"

"Through that door, I think," said Frank, whose sword trailed and clanked on the pavement, and they walked indoors together.

Here Colonel Buckman called out and overtook them, saying, he hoped Colonel Forester would favour the mess with his company at dinner. Philip thanked him and accepted. They were standing at the foot of the wooden staircase that led up to the officers' bedrooms, when a batman came down the passage with a letter on a tray.

"Captain Christy, sir ; a letter for you, brought by hand from the County Prison. An answer's waited for."

"It's from Mike," said Frank, as he tore the note open, and read, "H'm ! only three lines ; he wants to see me as soon as possible."

"You can't go to-day," whispered Forester, as he ascended the stairs.

"No," muttered Frank, and he sang out over the balusters : "There's no written answer. Say I'll call to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER IX.

A PAIR OF TRIED FRIENDS.

HER MAJESTY's officers are "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day ;" but their sleeping apartments are not on a level with the rest of their appurtenances. Frank Christy's "diggings" consisted of one smallish room, papered with hangings at 8*d.* a yard, and having a deal floor, an iron bedstead, and a fire-place just big enough to hold a kettle. The two or three easy chairs, the cheval glass, and the square of carpet that adorned it were Frank's own. He dragged them about from garrison to garrison, and they could boast that they had seen service. Frank's servant—who was better known by the name of "Spuds" than by his patronymics of Phelim O'Neil—had been engaged all the forenoon in unpacking and arranging other articles of his master's portable property, among which cigar-boxes, photographic-albums, and hunting-tops predominated. He received orders to go and fetch them some sherry and bitters, and be quick about it. Whilst he was gone Philip Forester sat down by the fire, and pored over the

note from Michael. Frank having removed his helmet, tunic, and spurred boots, put on a pair of slippers and a braided patrol jacket, lit a cigarette, and took the opposite seat. Spuds was not long gone, and, after setting the beverages on the table, was bidden to decamp speedily, the inducement of a boot-jack at his head being tendered as the alternative to immediate compliance.

To understand the conversation which ensued between the two comrades, it must be premised that Frank Christy and Phil. Forester were not friends of short standing, but old and firm allies, who had tried each other on many of those occasions, where, failing a devoted supporter, a man comes to grief. Both had done everything that officers can do without losing character. They had won and lost thousands on the turf and at cards. They had entangled themselves repeatedly with maids and matrons. They had fought, being tipsy, with policemen and roughs, and had shared side by side the nobler dangers of the Chinese and Abyssinian wars. Both were deep in the books of the money-lending fraternity, and their joint debts to tradesmen and others fell not far short of £20,000. Philip had the stronger head of the two, Frank the best heart; but their very differences of character dove-tailing so as to lock their natures firmly together, they liked each other as much as men can. Since Philip's engagement to Miss Graham he had turned over a new leaf, and Frank, for want of his company, had slightly mended his manners also; but though separated, the pair remained one in heart, and Philip continued to exercise over Frank an ascendancy which had begun when the two were boys at Eton, and had gone on increasing ever since.

So Forester took a gulp at the sherry, and when Spuds had left the room, asked drily:—"I say, Frank, what the devil brought your brother as chaplain to Tolminster gaol?"

"Goodness knows!" replied the dragoon, in disgust. "I did my best to dissuade him, and wrote to him about it, but he was down-right pig-headed."

"I wish you had written to me; I could have used interest to prevent his being elected."

"I heard of it too late. I wrote thinking my letter would take effect, and the next thing that reached me—through the newspapers—was that he had got the berth. He has not written to me since, till to-day."

"What sort of a fellow is he, your brother? I've never seen him. He writes coldly, as if his suspicions were aroused."

"Mike would take my word against all creation's," replied Frank. "He's the best fellow out, always ready to lend money, and never

jaws till he has signed a cheque. I don't know, though, that I should like him to guess the truth about Madge Hawthorne."

"No," said Philip, with a frown, "that's out of the question. We must keep him in ignorance, and give Madge the lie; that's our only course."

He drew out a silk handkerchief, wiped his lips with it, and took some time folding it and restoring it to his pocket. He was thinking all the while; then he laid a hand on Frank's knee, and said:

"Look here, we're in danger, Frank, and shall have to play without making any mistakes. Let me put my position clearly before you."

"There's no need to do that, old man. You know I always play up to your lead," responded the dragoon.

"Yes, but I don't want you to be under any misapprehensions as to my sentiments, my motives. You are aware that I love Rose Graham most tenderly?"

"Of course, any one who saw you with her as I have done could tell that."

"Some might think that I made love to her for her money, but I didn't," proceeded Philip, earnestly. "I loved her the first time we met, and now that she's blind, and has no hope of happiness but by marrying me, I am bound to cleave to her. I can't suffer any one to come between us for the gratification of a mere vengeance against me—least of all that woman who pretends to be my wife."

"How can she claim to be your wife?" said Frank, with a shrug. "If that sham Scotch marriage is all she has got to rely on——"

"She has nothing else but what you rightly call that sham marriage, and you bear me witness that it was a sham, don't you?"

"Egad, yes. You did the thing after dinner in that Scotch hotel. Dessert was on the table; Dubois had just brought in the coffee. You joined hands, grinning over the tray, and said: 'Here we are, man and wife;' then we all laughed together, and signed two certificates, of which you each kept a copy. That's how the affair took place, and I looked upon it as a joke; so did she, I'll take my oath. No woman ever thought herself married unless there was a parson and a church, by jingo!"

"Nevertheless, Margaret Hawthorne maintains that this was a true marriage, and when she way-laid me at that forge she told me she meant to enforce it."

"But you've burned the certificates, haven't you?"

"Yes, I picked up hers when she swooned after that awful business," said Philip. "Confound her! All that happened then was her own fault. I offered her a handsome allowance. I apolo-

gized. I confessed I hadn't treated her well, and must now throw myself upon her generosity. It was all of no use. She kept on screaming that she was my wife, and would expose me in the open church if I tried to marry Miss Graham."

"Ecod, women have no generosity," grumbled Frank, stirring the fire. "There's little Bool of ours got spooning a tobacconist's girl at Brighton, and she wanted to sue him for breach of promise. Hanged if he didn't have to buy a cartload of cigars to get off——"

"Never mind Bool," interrupted Philip, sharply. "The point for us is this: I've denied in a police-court that I ever knew or saw Madge. I've denied it to Rose and her father, who both believe me, and it's too late for me to retract. If your brother gets a scent of the truth we must draw him off somehow."

"I think you're too nervous about Mike," rejoined Frank, throwing down the poker, and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "If he asks me whether I know the woman I shall say plainly, no; if he brings me face to face with her I shall repeat my denial more emphatically still; if he bothers me after that I shall tell him to go and get shaved."

"If you do that we shall be all right," exclaimed Forester eagerly. "I'm sorry to have drawn you into this mess, Frank. If I had had time to reflect I might have acted differently, but I was put to my denial so suddenly, and I was so confused—in fact, I so funked telling the truth in that wretched moment when I should have been held responsible for what had befallen Rose—that—that——"

"No need to apologize," broke in Frank with friendly sympathy. "You're in a kind of ditch, and we must haul you out; but, I say, what will be the sentence on Madge at the trial?"

"She deserves penal servitude, by Heavens, for her dastardly assault, which was premeditated, I'll swear as long as I live!" ejaculated Philip, with excitement. His face was crimson, and during a minute he could not speak for emotion: then he cooled down. "Oh, she won't be sentenced at all, for we shall instruct our counsel to plead that she was out of her mind, and not to press for a conviction. If she doesn't make a fuss in the dock she'll leave the Court free. If she persists in abusing me so much the worse for her; she will be committed to an asylum, and will have to stay there till she gets reasonable."

"When will the trial come on?"

"Not till the spring assizes, I think in March—and I shall be married by that time."

"That's settled?"

"Quite settled. Rose, poor thing, is well now, and there's no

reason for longer delay. You'll see to-night how resigned she is under that cruel blindness which robbed her of every delight in life except my love and her father's. By Heavens, Frank, she bears it like a saint, and she is a saint."

Frank was touched, for Philip bowed his face into his hands, and for a moment was overcome by his sorrowful agitation. If the dragoon had felt any qualms at the pact of perjury which he and his friend had sealed together they must have vanished then.

But Frank felt no qualms, for he did not believe in the validity of the Scotch marriage.

He did not believe either that the assault on Miss Graham had been accidental. He thought Margaret had acted out of pure spite.

Further, he was of opinion that when a man wants to settle down into a respectable marriage he has a right to protect himself as he can against the minxes who would trump up old *liaisons* to his prejudice. All that a minx can fairly claim is money, and when a man has offered that in plenty he has fulfilled all that constitutes the point of honour among gentlemen.

Nevertheless, Frank, who had seen something of Madge Hawthorne, could not help remembering that she was a soft-tempered little thing, of lady-like speech and manners, and he said as much to Philip, expressing his surprise that "good cream should have turned so sour." "Madge has decent connections, hasn't she, Phil? Is there any chance of their coming forward to keep her?"

"No; she refused to give her maiden name before the magistrates, and she had quarrelled with her people before meeting me. She was staying at Woolwich with a former governess of hers, who is dead since."

"You never told me who her relations were. Did you ever see them?"

"I know her father's name is Hawthorne, as you do, but we never saw each other. I won't tell you anything about her family, because you'll be able to swear with greater truth that you know nothing about her."

"Quite so, and it doesn't interest me," said Frank. "After all, lady or not, she has behaved just like Dicky Bool's cigar girl, and I hate that sort of woman who lets you Scotch-marry her and then goes squeaking all over the shop."

He laughed, and made Forester smile by some other things he said about the bothering ways of the sex. But while the pair were still in converse the first dinner-gong unexpectedly sounded, and the faithful Spuds knocked, announcing—"hot wather, sorr."

Spuds obtained leave to enter, and Philip betook himself to the

wash-hand stand, while Frank doffed his clothes, and substituted for them the splendid habiliments in which officers are accustomed to dine.

In a few moments he stood arrayed in a blue shell-jacket with white collar and cuffs, gold-braided ; a white cashmere mess-waistcoat with gold embroidery, dark blue trousers with a broad gold stripe, patent leather boots, a dress shirt with pearl studs, and a cambric necktie. A few strokes with a pair of ivory-backed brushes, and his light wavy hair was ready to be crowned with the laced forage cap, which, set jauntily acock, completed his costume, and induced Philip Forester to remark that he had never seen a man in horse or foot who wore the Queen's livery with such smartness.

There was not much introduction necessary when Colonel Forester entered the dining-room, for most of the officers had seen him at their mahogany before. He was presented to the two *Lancers*—both quiet men rather abashed by the fastness of the "*Plungers*"—but as his military rank was superior to theirs he was placed in the seat of honour at the right of Dicky Bool, who was mess president for the week. Colonel Buckman sat opposite, and Frank lower down between Buttery Jarnes and Lord Harry Gayleard.

Behind Lieutenant Bool's chair rose a side-board blazing with regimental plate, the gifts of departed officers of the 12th ; and casting an eye along the table, one could reconnoitre such an array of silver *épergnes*, fruit-baskets, claret-jugs, and candlesticks, as might have gladdened a London alderman. The attendance was performed by mess-waiters, who were troopers, and whose close-cut hair and moustaches mated somewhat oddly with the livery breeches and white stockings usual to footmen. But they served rather better than footmen, for their hearts were in their work ; and the dishes they carried in were all excellent—so were the wines. It is necessary to say this, because it has been much the fashion in literature to speak with humorous disparagement of officers' messes ; and for the same reason it may be as well to add that the conversation at table was pleasant and lively throughout, not a wearisome round of vapid jokes and oft-repeated anecdotes. All colonels are not bores, nor do all majors perpetually drone one set of stories. Captains can treat of current topics with as much good humour and versatility as most civilian diners-out ; and even lieutenants and sub-lieutenants might for pungency and honest fun hold their own against the average talkers at the high tables in college halls and the Inns of Court. As for Dicky Bool, he was perfect in the chair.

After a really amusing dinner, and a game of pool afterwards in the billiard-room, Colonel Forester found it was half-past eight o'clock, and accordingly moved that he and Frank should set off for Fairdale, which was about four short miles distant. His dog-cart had been brought from the "Crown," where he had left it, and its silver lamps shed a bright circle of light on the portico outside the mess-room. Frank did not take off his military clothes, but hid their glory under an ulster (then a new fashion), and clambered up next his friend, who took the reins. Worthy Colonel Buckman, whose brick-coloured physiognomy always glowed jovially after dinner, stood on the door-steps and waved a good-bye to his guest:—"The oftener you come and see us, Forester, the more welcome, you know!" and when he had toddled back into the billiard-room, he remarked emphatically—

"Splendid fellow—that Forester. He was a credit to the cloth."

"Pity he should have had so much trouble about that assault affair," observed Captain Jarnes.

"I say, we shall have to fine Buttery a gallon if he always strums on that string," said Dicky Bool to Lord Harry.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEAUTIFUL MISS GRAHAM.

FOUR miles in twenty minutes by moonlight, and the horse fresh as paint at the finish—this is what Frank called good driving. The last mile had lain through Fairdale Park, an estate of enchanting beauty, and never seen to better advantage than when the moonbeams played among its masses of tall oaks and leafy elms. Well might Philip Forester glance round him with some pride at the demesne which was soon to be his; but with the prospect of possession came the sad thought that the heiress to all these fair lands would never again gaze on their loveliness; and he sighed.

Rose Graham—"the beautiful Miss Graham," as she had been commonly called—was the daughter of Herbert Graham, Esq., the son of a retired iron-founder. Mr. Graham had never occupied himself with manufacturing, for he was born when his father was already rich, and had been expensively educated with a view to his making a figure in the world. But his tastes had precluded him

from fulfilling the paternal hopes, and had led him to prefer the life of a scholar, traveller, and society *causeur*. He had spent many years visiting foreign lands, choosing rather the bye-ways of the artist than the beaten tracks of tourists, and was a first-rate linguist and connoisseur of art, though he had never written a book to air his acquirements, nor meant to write one. He was the friend of authors, painters, and men of science, and a patient thinker on the problems touching social improvements. Practically he did little for the causes which he had at heart beyond contributing money liberally to promote them, for he was not a man of action or of profuse speech. He shunned committees, and the noisy meetings of learned societies; and, perhaps, pushed a trifle too far that love of reserve, which may keep a wise man from being as useful in his generation as he might be. It is certain that Mr. Graham's knowledge, distributed piecemeal, would have furnished capital for ten members of parliament, and twenty social agitators. In politics he held no other opinions than what are common to all reasonable men; but being reputed to have £30,000 a-year, he had been pressed with offers of seats and dignities by both great parties in the State, and had declined. He was a magistrate, of course, and had served in the office of sheriff, as a matter of duty; but he frequently alluded to the year of his shrievalty as the most miserable in his life. He had been compelled to see a man hanged.

Mr. Graham had been married at the age of thirty, but had early lost his wife, and been left with an only daughter, on whom all his affections centred. It is impossible to conceive a love deeper and more absorbing than the father felt for the sweet-faced child, whose graces of mind and person constantly recalled those of her mother who had been so dear to him—for Mr. Graham's was a love match, and when death took from him the partner of a three years' happy union, he thought for a while that he should never recover from the blow.

Rose was destined to be her father's consolation—the joy and sunshine of his life. She had an exquisitely gracious temper, and inherited so much of her father's talent, that her education became as easy a task to herself as it was a pleasurable one to her teachers. She was fond of music, poetry, art in all its branches—delighted in travel, and picked up languages with a facility that had often been pronounced extraordinary by foreigners who heard her prattle their tongues with a faultless accent. Mr. Graham began to feel the blessing of being rich when his wealth afforded him the means of imparting to his daughter the highest possible degree of intellectual culture, and of satisfying every fancy she could form. He was

indeed much richer than people supposed him to be from his unostentatious way of spending money, and he became richer every year, when he began to look forward to the inevitable time when Rose must leave him, and to make provision, so that her children and children's children might never want anything that wealth can procure. So time passed away, and Rose, after being her father's pet, became his companion, till he gradually saw her bloom from girlhood into a maidenhood full of charm and promise. This transformation, almost imperceptible to himself, became apparent to others long before he could realize that his child was growing into a woman; and there was a strange mixture of gladness and fatherly regret in his sensations the first time he heard Rose alluded to as "the beautiful Miss Graham," and found that people were speculating as to whom she would marry. When this time arrived, Mr. Graham looked on his daughter, and recognized that she was one whom any man might be proud to win. She was full of health and spirits, rode and danced well, sang with a voice gay as a humming-bird's, and loved pretty dresses, cheerful company, merry-making, and all the other bright things which it is natural and good for her sex to delight in. She was, in fact, the most winsome type of an English girl.

Mr. Graham had resolved that he would not fetter his daughter's choice of a husband, and she settled her fate in her first London season by falling in love with Colonel Forester. Philip was not the kind of son-in-law Mr. Graham would have preferred, (when is a father ever wholly satisfied with his only child's selection?) but as a member of Lord St. Hubert's family, and a quondam officer of the Guards, his rank was unimpeachable; nor did Mr. Graham lay much importance by the fact that Philip had led a wild life. He was disposed to make allowances for military men, who in time of peace have little else to do but be wild. His main cause for uneasiness arose from the doubt as to whether Philip Forester loved Rose as she deserved to be loved; and his fears on this head had not yet been wholly allayed when the accident occurred which was to render Rose for ever dependent, as a little child, on the affection and forbearance of those who surrounded her.

The first effect of this catastrophe on Mr. Graham was so frightful, that his hair, which had been scarcely streaked with grey, turned white within a week. But he loved his daughter too deeply to sink under the shock. The dormant energies of his nature rallied at one bound, and he prayed Heaven for a long life that he might be ever present to watch over his afflicted child.

In the first hours of his anguish Mr. Graham almost hoped that

his daughter would pass away and be spared the long misery of a life of darkness. But when it became certain that she would live, his most fervent trust was that she might become the mother of children, who would bind her to life; and he waited with a sickening anxiety to see what course Colonel Forester would take. Poor Rose had, of course, released her lover from his engagement; and if the latter had shown the least luke-warmness in maintaining his suit, not even all the father's earnest desire for the match would have induced him to entrust his child's happiness to a man whose sentiments had not stood proof against misfortune. But Philip Forester's love—for it is not only the good and pure who love—came out cleansed and strengthened from the fiery ordeal, and he urged his suit with an ardour so sincere, with a wooing so tender and impassioned, that the poor girl, who had given the whole of her young trusting heart to this her first love, had not the strength to reject his prayers. She accepted him again, and from that moment Mr. Graham loved Philip with an intensity of gratitude which only a father can feel. The suspicion that Rose's lover might be actuated by mercenary motives, was one which he could not entertain a moment, for he did not consider that a man with Captain Forester's connections could be in serious pecuniary straits in high-life. Prodigals, as he knew, generally contrive to pay their debts somehow, and obtain, through their connections, snug posts of emolument when they commence their careers afresh. Therefore Mr. Graham gave Philip credit for a disinterestedness without alloy, and, regarding him in the light of a man who had nobly taken his share of the grief which had afflicted them all, and had chivalrously vowed to devote his whole existence to comfort the stricken child, of whose misfortune he had, to some extent, been the involuntary cause—regarding him in this light, Mr. Graham took Philip Forester to his heart like a son, and cherished him as his daughter's saviour.

What a blight it was, however, that had fallen upon the envied millionaire's house! Lately the abode of every refinement, a museum of art treasures, a palace of song, always enlivened by the carolling of its young mistress; it was now hushed, and all who moved within it had sad faces. Not the father alone, but every friend and servant had been smitten with sorrow at the calamity which had overtaken Rose Graham. It was only in her presence that they restrained the tears and expressions of sympathy which would have added to her grief, and made her angelic resignation more difficult.

Fairdale Hall was a building in the style of the Stuart epoch, with very wide passages, which had been filled with statues and

pieces of antique furniture. Mr. Graham formerly took a pride in these things, but now he had caused them all to be removed, lest they should be in his daughter's way, when she walked, as she sometimes tried to do—in spite of prohibitions—unattended. He had, further, ordered an architect to prepare plans for a new mansion, in which everything should be adapted to the use of a blind occupant. There were to be easy gradients instead of staircases, walls padded with satin, and floors thickly carpeted. Numerous conservatories were also to be contrived for the recreation of those senses which in the blind are most alert—so that the singing of melodious birds and the perfume of flowers might never fail.

Mr. Graham could have for the future no other pre-occupation than to study the tastes and whims of the blind. He had bought all the books which treat of these themes, and instituted a correspondence with physicians celebrated for their treatment of ophthalmia. He had presented Fairdale Church with a peal of bells, and paid ringers to sound the chimes twice every day, for Rose loved chimes; and he had ordered the removal of all the jangling copper room-bells in the house, which were replaced by others of silver, which tinkled with tuneful clearness. Every apartment was provided with a musical clock which chimed the quarters; and in selecting a lady-companion for Rose, Mr. Graham had chosen from among more than a hundred candidates, one who, besides being a gentlewoman in birth and education, and a person of the utmost tact and goodness, possessed that rare quality of a sweet, soft, cordial voice, which it freshens one to hear.

Amidst all these cares it was an unspeakable relief to Mr. Graham that his daughter's education had been so cultivated that she could find in music a never-tiring solace for her deprivation of sight; but more than all did he congratulate himself and bless Heaven, for that his child's heart had been schooled to a faith in Christian truth, which she had been taught to prize above all other knowledge. Rose Graham's masters and mistresses had never trained her in the ways of strong-mindedness, nor in that semi-sceptical religion of mere outward observances which constitutes the religiousness of perhaps not a few young ladies in society. She was a humble believer in our redemption by Christ's blessed sacrifice, so that when her trial fell upon her, she could, after the first pang of pain and despair was past, turn her sightless eyes towards Him, in whose presence is fulness of light, and joy which even the blind may see.

CHAPTER XI.

A PARTY AT FAIRDALE.

PHILIP FORESTER's footing at Fairdale became at once apparent to Frank, by the respect with which the servants treated Miss Graham's betrothed.

When they alighted, the old butler bowed with a kind of veneration, and announced that the ladies were in the drawing-room. The gentlemen were still sitting over their wine.

"Has there been company to dinner, then?" asked Philip.

"Yes, sir. Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong and Mr. Hugh Armstrong came over from Gorsemoor, and Sir Wemyss Christy and Miss Christy, their visitors, accompanied them."

"Hullo! that's news for you, Frank; did you know your uncle was coming into Eastshire?" inquired Philip, as they both divested themselves of their overcoats.

"No. I wonder what he can have come about," muttered Frank.

"You don't suppose your brother has been writing to him about this affair, do you?" whispered Philip.

"It would be very unlike him if he had. My uncle knows old Armstrong well; they are often together in London. Perhaps there may be nothing unusual in this visit——"

At this moment sounds of laughter were heard coming from the dining-room. One voice resounded particularly from its hale freshness. "Oh, it's all right," said Frank. "I hear my uncle enjoying his own jokes; if there were anything in the wind he'd be grim as a bear."

"Will you go into the dining-room, sir?" asked the butler.

"No; we will join the ladies," said Philip; and he himself led the way in the direction of the drawing-room.

Their footsteps made little noise on the soft carpet of the passage; but faint as they were, Rose Graham detected the step of her lover, and before the door was opened she had turned her face with a wistful air towards it.

Frank had not seen Miss Graham since the accident, and he thrilled slightly, changing colour, as he cast his eyes towards the sofa where the blind girl sat.

Those who have seen Paul Delaroche's picture of Lady Jane Grey on the scaffold know what touching beauty a countenance may retain, though the eyes be bandaged. Rose Graham wore over

hers a handkerchief of pale blue silk, which harmonized with the trimmings of her white dress; but there was nothing to conceal the perfect contour of her small mouth and chin, her dazzling white teeth, or the exquisite shape of her head, with its wealth of auburn hair. People who had never met Rose before her blindness might still have called her "the beautiful Miss Graham," for her bandage lent a certain piquancy to her expression. A stranger might have fancied she was playing at a game of forfeits, and would have beheld in imagination the pair of radiant blue eyes which nature must have given to light up those features. It was only to those who, like Frank, could not dissociate the present from the past, that Miss Graham's bandage suggested thoughts inexpressibly harrowing.

"How late you are, Philip," said Rose, in a voice of tender reproach, as the friends entered. "I wished you to bring Captain Christy to dinner."

"It's all his own fault," answered Philip gaily, as he crossed the room and stooped to kiss her forehead. "You can never snatch away these Dragoons from their mess, and he insisted I should stop and be entertained by him."

"Well, he missed dining with his uncle and his cousin Helen," said Rose with a smile. "But how are you, Captain Christy? Give me your hand, please; and, Philip, tell me how your friend is dressed. You know I like to picture my visitors exactly as they look."

"Oh, Frank is very gorgeous to-night," said Philip; and when he had described the Dragoon's mess costume, he added laughing: "and he looks quite awkward in his rich clothes, as you and I have often agreed that he does in uniform."

"Oh, don't believe that, Captain Christy," denied Rose, with gentle mirth. "Philip was always the first to declare that nobody wears uniform as you do—and I am sure we girls all thought so."

"So does he," laughed Philip.

"Oh, no, Captain Christy must have altered wonderfully if he has a spark of conceit in him," said Rose.

Frank was almost choking, and could not articulate a word. All this was so different from what he had expected; and the contrast between Miss Graham's present position and the vivacious sparkle of her glance the last time he had seen her, cut him to the soul. His cousin, Nelly Christy, who was watching him, liked him all the better for the tears which started to his eyes, and which rendered him blind for a moment to the fact that she was sitting by.

Nelly was a brunette of twenty, with merry brown eyes, and a small compact figure. If she had not one of those faces which at

once attract all the men in a room, it was a face upon which men would look again and again with renewed pleasure after they had once noticed it.

"Good evening, Frank," she said, rousing her cousin from his emotion, and holding out her hand. "Let me introduce you to Mrs. Armstrong, and Mrs. Merewether."

Mrs. Merewether was Rose's companion, a lady of middle age, but young in appearance because of her great serenity of expression. Mrs. Armstrong was a tall and superb dame, of queen-like affability, who was dressed in black velvet, with a great deal of coral about her hair, neck, and wrists.

Frank made two courteous bows.

"I have long desired to know you, Captain Christy," said Mrs. Armstrong, pleasantly. "Mr. Armstrong and your uncle are such old friends that we ought to have met before, and my son Hugh lately gave me an enthusiastic account of some doings he had with you at Brighton."

"Mr. Hugh paints in *couleur de rose*, then, for it seems my cousin has not been up to much good at Brighton," observed Nelly.

"Oh, Helen, officers are shamefully maligned," ejaculated Rose Graham. "I am sure I have no feeling with those who would have them always poring over trigonometry, like the Prussians."

"Before the war it was the French they used to hold up as our example," remarked Frank, with an effort to recover his equanimity.

"I should think nobody would do that now," said Mrs. Armstrong, toying with her fan. "Have you heard this evening's news, that Metz has capitulated?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Philip Forester, who had seated himself beside Rose on the sofa. "Surely Bazaine cannot have been such a cur as to capitulate with a hundred and fifty thousand men?"

"No British army would have shown so little spirit, would they, Captain Christy?" ejaculated Rose, with an affectionate furtive pressure of her lover's hand.

"No," replied Frank, with the tranquillity of conviction.

"Come, Frank, don't brag," said Miss Nelly, who was what girls call a "tease." "Do you mean to say that if an English general ordered you to lay down your arms you would not obey as these Frenchmen have done?"

"If you will name a British general who would give such an order, I may be able to answer you," was the Dragoon's rejoinder.

"That is a fair retort, my dear Helen," said Mrs. Armstrong,

laughing ; " though you must not suppose your cousin is in earnest, Captain Christy. She is at heart very proud of your achievements, and talks of them loyally enough when you are not present."

Nelly gave a toss of her brown curls. She *was* very proud indeed of her handsome cousin, only it did not suit her that he should know it. She betook herself blushing to the study of some photographic albums, leaving the Dragoon free to follow her if he pleased, which he did, and the pair continued to bandy a little chaff in low tones.

At this juncture the gentlemen returned from the dining-room. Mr. Armstrong, a consequential little old gentleman of sixty, led the way ; Sir Wemyss Christy strode beside him, straight as a ramrod, and dry as a chip ; a man with a flowing iron grey beard and benevolent features, but nervous about the atmosphere he breathed, and addicted to sniffing whenever he entered a room, to test whether there was a sufficient provision of oxygen in it.

Mr. Graham walked behind, and, if Frank had been so profoundly moved by the sight of Rose Graham, he was now almost as much shocked at the aspect of her father, who seemed to have aged by twenty years since their last meeting. It has been said that Mr. Graham's hair had turned perfectly white ; but his sorrow had chiefly marked itself in deep lines all over his thin, smooth-shaved face, which gave a pinched expression to the corners of his mouth, where of old smiles had continually hovered. His step had become heavy, his shoulders stooped, and his very voice had aged so that he was obliged to cough before speaking in order that he might pitch his tone in such a key as would not grate on his daughter's ear. His first glance on entering the room was to where Rose sat—and what a glance it was !—then he accosted Frank, and, reading the evident pity on his face, squeezed his hand with silent force. There was a pathetic eloquence in the pressure. They talked some minutes before Frank turned away to speak with his uncle and Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Armstrong, one of the members for the county of Eastshire, was small to look at, but as combative as he was little ; and a fierce Tory. He held uncompromising views about the duties of wives towards their husbands, servants to their masters, and children to their parents. He kept a stern eye on dissenters, operatives on the strike, poachers, and foreign revolutionists, and exposed the doings of all these disorderly folks in emphatic speeches which the Speaker of the House was often obliged to cut short (reluctantly no doubt), in obedience to motions for a count-out. He had a horror of Frenchmen and Yankees, and always went into the lobby with partisans

of a spirited foreign policy, big armaments, ultimatums to foreign powers, martial law for Ireland, and resistance to the Colonies. But at home he was a quiet man, because of Mrs. Armstrong.

Sir Wemyss Christy was a great crony of the little M.P., and always voted with him on motions for exterminating particular peccant sections of the human race; but he was much interested in the longevity of our human family as a whole, and was convinced that we could all live to the age of a hundred years if we took proper care of ourselves. This was his hobby, and he rode it hard. He was always unearthing centenarians, and calling attention to them in the *Times*. He would not allow it to be said that a man was suffering from the infirmities of age unless he were past ninety—"infirmities of self-indulgence they are, sir, and nothing else," he would say sternly, and then he would bare his biceps to show what sort of an arm a man ought to wield at sixty-five. Truth to say, he was as hale and wiry as a man of forty, thanks to the minute hygienic precautions which engrossed all his thoughts. Every morning he sparred at himself for an hour opposite a looking-glass; he ate and drank by the ounce; eschewed tobacco, spirits, sauces, pastry, and pickles; took seven full and deep breathings of out-door air every hour; and always complained of the temperature of the rooms he entered as being too hot or cold. Withal a kind man despite his crotchets, he doted upon his daughter, and his conduct towards his two nephews, Frank and Michael, had been especially honourable and fine. They had no claim on his benefactions beyond being his brother's children, but he had treated them as if they were sons of his own, and had refrained from remarrying so that Frank might not be deprived of the baronetcy and entailed estates he had been brought up to expect. However, Sir Wemyss Christy hated debts, and having once paid seven thousand pounds of Frank's "ticks," had solemnly warned him that if he ever again exceeded his allowance of £600 a year, he—Sir Wemyss—would forthwith take a second wife, and put "at least six sons" between the reprobate and the family honours.

"How do you do, Frank," said the baronet, squeezing the Dragoon's hand with an iron grip. "I say, though, don't you find the air in this room horribly stuffy?"

"It is rather," said Frank, who always humoured his uncle's whims. "Suppose we go into the conservatory."

"Ah, this is more like it!" exclaimed Sir Wemyss, inhaling the fresh scent of some autumn flowers. "Why can't people understand that their lungs are to be kept as clean as the rest of their bodies? The world is full of persons committing slow suicide; not one

in a thousand knows how to feed or breathe properly. But how is your brother; have you seen him?"

"Not yet. I was provoked at his accepting that gaol chaplaincy."

"A queer thing, for I had twice offered to get him better preferment. However, your brother is the best man in the family, Frank, let us have no mistake about that, and he is entitled to go his own way. He has never given me an hour's uneasiness since I took charge of him."

"You are much prouder of me, though," said Frank. "I always was your pet, uncle; you can't deny it, though you frown."

"Pet, forsooth! don't you put that into your pate, you dog," exclaimed Sir Wemyss, wagging his head. "Egad, another such pet and I should have been driven to sweeping a crossing. But, I say, boy, you are sticking to our conventions about debt — eh, what?"

"I have given up debts," responded the Dragoon, coolly. "I pay for everything in ready money, and I find I can get things much cheaper."

"I always told you you would," remarked Sir Wemyss, with the simplicity of entire reliance. "And now all you've got to do is to get promoted and marry."

"I don't think I shall have to wait long for my next step by purchase, as our major is going to retire soon," said Frank. "As to marriage, that's another pair of shoes."

"Why shouldn't you marry, sir? Do you mean to spend your life like a cub prowling round other people's hen-yards?"

"Marriage is an expensive and solemn business," said Frank. "A wife costs as much to keep as three hunters."

"Well, I've promised you that on the day you marry you shall have twenty thousand pounds, which would be enough to keep six. Make a good choice, though—a brave girl who will like you enough to keep you steady."

Saying this, Sir Wemyss cast a look towards the table where Nelly sat. It had long been his secret wish that Frank should marry Nelly, that Oakleigh Hall might remain her home; and it rather annoyed him that his nephew had not divined his wish. The two returned to the drawing-room, and Frank rejoiced that no allusion had been made to Margaret Field. He was afraid that Hugh Armstrong might, without meaning harm, have reported to the baronet the scene which had taken place between Michael and the prisoner; and he determined to caution him against committing this mistake.

Hugh Armstrong had installed himself near Nelly, and seemed

to be flirting with her, judging by their gaiety; but Nelly left her place to preside, by Rose Graham's desire, at the tea-urn; then Frank sidled up to the young magistrate, and proffered his request.

"It's not of much importance," he said, "only my uncle might suspect there was more in the matter than I cared to state, whereas there isn't a rap."

"Of course there isn't," replied Hugh Armstrong; "but I am glad you told me, for I might have spoken inadvertently. Shall we see you at Gorsemoor to-morrow? We're going to have a day with the pheasants."

"Thanks; I am afraid I must go and see my brother at the gaol. The ravings of that woman have disturbed him, and he wants to speak to me about her."

"What an idea! Why we all warned him that she was cracked as a bell. However, come up to luncheon when you have seen your brother, and bring him with you. We hope to see you at Gorsemoor often during your uncle's stay with us."

"I'll come with pleasure. They tell me yours is the best shooting in the county."

Here Nelly beckoned to Frank to fetch his cup of tea.

"What were you saying to Mr. Armstrong?" she asked, as he sat down beside her at the table.

"He invited me to lunch to-morrow, and I said I'd come if only for the pleasure of seeing you."

"How very gracious! You generally run away when papa and I are in the neighbourhood. We don't see you for months together."

"Come, Nelly, we saw each other all last season, and I danced with you at least a dozen times."

"What a retentive memory. You must have taken notes."

"No, but I remember thinking how uncommonly pretty you looked."

"Thank you, my lord. And will your gallant regiment give a ball at Tolminster, so that I may show off my paces again?"

"By Jove! it's a good idea: we will if you stay long enough. You won't be going yet awhile, eh?"

"Probably not until after Miss Graham's marriage," answered Nelly, lapsing grave. "We came here chiefly to see Michael, and help to make him comfortable in his new home; but I wanted to see Rose Graham, too, and I have promised to come and stay a week at Fairdale, and be her bridesmaid—poor darling."

"Are you much acquainted with the Grahams, Nelly?" inquired Frank, lowering his voice.

"We never met till last spring, in London, at Mr. Armstrong's

house, but we quickly became friends," said Nelly; "and oh, Frank, what a horrible thing it is to see her in this condition. When we came here this afternoon I cried two hours, and I shall begin again if we talk about it."

While the cousinly pair were thus discoursing, the remainder of the company were gathered round the sofa, where Rose Graham had just been prevailed upon to fix a date for her wedding. The date selected was the 10th December, six weeks from that evening, and the poor blushing girl gave way to a little emotion as she placed her hand in her lover's to signify their now definite betrothal. Mr. Graham was affected too, but his emotion was one of relief; and he marked with deep thankfulness how adoringly Philip raised his future wife's hand to his lips, and what words of tender coaxing he used to dry her tears, and make her smile again.

She did smile very soon, and then Philip, leaving his place, approached Frank to bring him the glad news, and receive his congratulations. There was a flush of joy in his face as he invited his old comrade to act as his "best man."

"But I have another request to make," added he. "Rose and I want your brother Michael to marry us."

"I can answer for Michael that he will be delighted," said Frank.

"Delighted, of course he will!" echoed Sir Wemyss Christy. "We will call upon him about it the day after to-morrow; and when I introduce my second nephew to you, Miss Graham, I am certain you will agree that no marriage knot could be tied by a better man, though I am his uncle who say it."

"I very much wish to know Mr. Christy," replied Rose Graham, gently. "And if you carry Philip's message to him, Sir Wemyss, be sure to tell him, please, that I have joined my own special request to it."

When Rose had said this Philip drew near to Frank, and whispered:—"I shall be at Gorsemoor to-morrow. Mind you come as soon as you have seen your brother. I shall be nervous until I hear how he takes your denial."

CHAPTER XII.

A CONFRONTATION.

THE next day was rainy and unpropitious to the shooting party at Gorsemoor; but immediately after morning parade Frank put off his uniform and went to the prison. The distance from the barracks was about half a mile, and he arrived just after the chapel service. Michael was waiting for him.

Waiting with a sickening anxiety, for the chaplain longed, and yet dreaded, to hear how his brother could have been drawn into the abominable crime of compassing a fellow-creature's ruin. Arguing Frank's case with all the subtlety of love, he had mentally forged for him every excuse that could be urged by fraternal casuistry, but to think that Frank needed such excuses was unspeakably bitter. He trusted that some explanation would be forthcoming that would reduce his brother's share in Margaret Field's persecution to an act of thoughtlessness, but the more he pondered over the subject the less he saw how any such explanation was possible.

Michael had now been ten days in the gaol, and had held several interviews with Margaret without being able to detect a single inconsistency in her narrative. On the contrary, additional little circumstantialities had established the identity of Frank with "Lieutenant Moore" beyond any question. Margaret had not relaxed from her cold manner; but her health was better—she seemed to have resumed an interest in life, and showed the chaplain that she fully relied upon him to see her righted.

Frank was ushered into the office, and Michael, who was visiting in the cells, was apprised of his arrival by a warder. He changed colour, and walked to the office with a beating heart—hoping, praying, that he might find in his brother's face signs of a dejection indicating penitence.

But Frank looked the same sunny-featured, unconcerned fellow as ever. He had hung up his overcoat, put his umbrella in a corner, and made himself at home at the table, where he was wiling away the moments by sketching a woman's head on some blotting paper. He crumpled up this production and tossed it into the fire on Michael's entrance.

"And how are you, Mike?" he said, breezily. "I ought to blow you up for coming to shove yourself into this hole; but I suppose

it would be of no use. Every man to his taste, as the nigger said when he married the baboon's sister."

"I thought myself that it was mere inclination that brought me here, but I have found reason to believe that it was God himself who led me by the hand," answered Michael, seriously.

"H'm—h'm—of course. Well, do you sing hymns to the fellows while they are on the tread-mill? Whatever your work is, old man, it doesn't seem to agree with you, for your phiz is dismal."

"Do I look dismal? I cannot say the same of you," rejoined Michael, with a smile; "you are jollity itself."

"Thanks, yes; I feel pretty fit. I suppose you know that uncle Wemyss and Nelly are here?"

"Nelly wrote to me that she was coming to stay with the Armstrongs."

"And she will pay you a visit one of these days to put your diggings to rights. I conclude you've a shanty of some sort. You don't sleep in this room, do you?"

"Oh, no; but you speak very contemptuously of this room," laughed Michael. "You should have seen it ten days ago! Mrs. Baillie turned a couple of her female prisoners into it, and they have scrubbed to such good purpose that we flattered ourselves it looked as good as new."

"Fancy having one's rooms scrubbed by female prisoners! I'd open the window and tell 'em to escape. But who is Mrs. Baillie?"

"The matron, and the widow of an officer in the Hussars. She tells me she has met you at Aldershot."

"Baillie—Baillie? It can't be Flora Baillie, who was married to a man in the 15th?"

"I think the 15th was her husband's regiment."

"By Jove! A neat stepper, isn't she, with high action? I hardly knew her husband, but I remember she kept him nicely drilled, always 'head erect and eyes front.' Egad, though, do they take officers' widows to furnish this place with?"

He continued to rattle on in this style, sitting by the fire and poking it into a blaze, and Michael, who sat opposite, did not know what to make of him. He watched narrowly for tokens of uneasiness or remorse, and saw none whatever. There was nothing forced in Frank's light-heartedness, and Michael so shrank from the exposure of his brother's duplicity, that he had not the nerve to speak the first word that might bring misunderstanding—perhaps estrangement—between them. Even as he was blaming himself for his lack of moral courage, the explanation came abruptly like a flash.

"Talking of married people," said Frank, "I am the bearer of a

message to you from my chum Forester. You know he is going to marry poor Miss Graham of Fairdale, and they both want you to officiate at the wedding. I have made them a promise in your name."

Michael coughed, but his reply was firm.

"I cannot understand, Frank, how Colonel Forester can think of marrying Miss Graham whilst he has a wife still alive."

"Who told you that?" retorted Frank, frowning. "Have you let yourself be hounded by that mad woman who destroyed Miss Graham's eyesight?"

"Colonel Forester is a very intimate friend of yours, is he not?"

"He and I are like two fingers of one hand."

"I ask because, although I have heard you mention his name, I cannot recollect having ever seen him with you."

"Oh, that is easy enough to explain," answered Frank, impatiently. "You were at Winchester, I at Eton; we have not lived much together, and know little of each other's friends. But Forester and I have been chums these twenty years, and I can assure you most positively that he is not married."

"I have a certainty to the contrary," said Michael gravely; "and I know the man who witnessed his marriage."

"Who might that be?" was Frank's placid rejoinder.

"Yourself. Look here, Frank," added the chaplain, lifting up a hand to check the reply which had risen to his brother's lips; "I know everything, so it is not necessary that you should keep up the concealment. And I make every allowance for you, old fellow; indeed I do. I have turned over the facts in my own mind, and see how they must have happened. You embarked in this affair thoughtlessly, without meaning harm, and simply to please the man who beguiled you; and now with your usual good-nature you are withholding the truth to shield him. And perhaps, too, because you are a little afraid of the consequences of your mistake as regards yourself. But you will speak the truth when I tell you what misery you have unwittingly caused. When I came here I found that poor woman was almost heart-broken—and, what is worse, her soul was going to absolute perdition under the overwhelming sense of the injustice she had suffered. But, you see, God has not allowed her to remain friendless; and has raised up me, of all men in the world, to bring her innocence to light! And yet even in this let us recognize His mercy, for who knows what might have happened to you if your secret had fallen into hands eager to take vengeance on you? Just think of that, Frank! Consider your position if you had been summoned into court and confronted with irrefutable testimony to the fact that you had conspired—you, a soldier and a

gentleman—to betray the trust placed in you by a helpless woman, and then to crush her by a false accusation! All may yet be saved, however, if you manfully acknowledge your fault, and take your stand with me by this poor woman's side. I do not even think that a public exposure will be necessary. It will be enough that Colonel Forester should renounce his marriage with Miss Graham, and that on the trial the witnesses for the prosecution should ask leave to withdraw from the charge, stating their conviction that the assault on Miss Graham was the result of an accident; which would, of course, make the indictment collapse. Mrs. Field would be satisfied on those terms. She does not want to see you disgraced, poor woman; she has told me so. Come, Frank, you will put trust in your brother, won't you?" and, saying this, Michael placed his hands on his brother's, and gazed at him with eyes yearning in affectionate appeal.

But from first to last the Dragoon had not blenched a shade.

"My dear Mike, you must be cracked," said he. "I cannot make head or tail of anything you say. Pray explain yourself."

"Do you mean to deny, then?" exclaimed Michael, in sheer amazement.

"I most categorically deny upon oath that I ever saw Philip Forester married."

"And do you deny that you and *Lieutenant Moore* are one and the same person?"

"Certainly I am not Lieutenant Moore, and I pledge you my word that I have never made use of any such name for the purpose of witnessing a marriage."

"And will you deny that you know Margaret Field?"

"I know a dozen Margarets, but have never to my knowledge spoken with a Margaret Field."

"Well, but then," ejaculated Michael, like one staggered; "well, but how can you account for this prisoner being able to describe you so minutely? She knows of your bull-dog Wasp, of the bullet you are wearing now on your watch-guard—even of a sword-scar above your right elbow."

"She might know of a hundred such things without the proof being worth an atom," interrupted Frank. "It seems pretty clear the woman has been seduced by an officer, but Forester's plea is that he was not the man, and that she made a mistake in identifying him. Many are of opinion that she is hallucinated, and if so it is quite likely that in trumping up alleged witnesses of her marriage she may have drawn portraits from memory of different military men whom she had seen at Chatham, Aldershot, Woolwich, or any other

of the garrison towns where she resided. Her sketching the bulldog and me only proves that Wasp and I become pretty conspicuous figures wherever we go, which is not wonderful considering my stature and the dog's ugliness. As for my sword-scar, anybody may have noticed it who has seen me boating or cricketing with my sleeves tucked up. That is the only explanation I have to offer."

When we have prefigured any scene in our mind's eye, it almost invariably happens that the reality turns out quite different. Michael had been prepared for everything except an uncompromising denial of Margaret Field's story. Frank's attitude of resistance threw him into complete disarray. After fidgeting about the room for some moments in his attempts to rally, he asked distraughtly,

"Do you mind being confronted with Margaret Field?"

"Not in the least," said Frank, with indifference.

"I will go and ask the governor's leave—it is only a formality. The confrontation must take place sooner or later, and we shall do better to bring it about at once."

"Go by all means, if you believe a maniac's word rather than mine," replied Frank, derisively; and he stationed himself on the hearthrug, with his back leaning against the mantel-shelf.

Michael, who had moved half-way towards the door, returned and looked his brother in his eyes.

"Frank, this is not a question of believing in your word," he said, earnestly. "There is a woman in this prison who risks being condemned to years of penal servitude. Whatever else she may be, she is not a mad woman—that I declare; so her charges against you are either true or maliciously false. For your own sake, the facts must be sifted."

"All right, old boy; don't excite yourself," said Frank. "I am as impatient as you to have the absurd fables quashed;" and he whistled the first bars of an opera tune whilst his brother left the room.

The Dragoon was not sorry to be alone for a few minutes that he might compose himself for the rencounter in which so much was going to depend on his coolness. A man who stands on a scaffolding and hears it crack under his feet may wear some such expression as passed for a moment over Frank's features. But it was only for a moment. The splendid nerve which had carried him unmoved through battle-fields, and had braced him to stand without a tremor over a gaming-table where thousands of his money were being staked on the colour of a card, came to his rescue now. He had only to think of his friendship for Forester, of poor Miss Graham's happiness, which would be totally wrecked if he flinched, and of his

own prospects, the which, whatever Michael might think, were involved in his making a resolute stand. It was not out of sympathy for such a woman as Margaret that he was going to desert his colours, and, having once chosen his side, he was a man to fight unto the death. In less than five minutes he felt ready for war.

He had thought he should be led to Margaret's cell, but this would have been a breach of prison rules. In strict accordance with the regulations, prisoners should only receive visits in a room—or rather a sort of cage—fitted with grated partitions which keep them six feet distant from their visitors and preclude contact, as well as conversation in any key not loud enough for the warder (who stands between the two gratings) to hear. But these restrictions may be waived at the discretion of the governor. With Captain Keyser's consent, the chaplain had decided that the interview should be held in his own room.

The door opened: first Michael entered, then Miss Mac Craik and the prisoner. The latter was much altered since the day when Michael had first seen her, and altered for the better. She was dressed in a well-cut gown of dark Scottish tartan; her black hair was neatly arranged in the prevailing fashion of the day; on her left hand glittered a wedding-ring and keeper set with turquoises. But Frank Christy, who had never seen her at her worst, thought her far from improved. He had known her a light-hearted, laughing little thing, giddy as a school-girl; he found her a pale, wasted creature, shooting an almost weird light out of her large staring eyes. Drawing himself up he made a slight bow—merely the bow that was due to the prisoner by right of her sex.

Margaret had advanced to the middle of the room, and, after patiently waiting for a word of recognition, said in a voice that quavered somewhat:

"Do you recollect me, Captain Christy?"

"Not in the least," said Frank.

"We have met before."

"I have no remembrance of it."

Margaret advanced another step.

"Please look at me. Am I not the woman who accompanied Colonel Forester and you to Scotland in the autumn of 1867, and was married to Colonel Forester in your presence and in that of a French servant named Dubois, at the Albany Hotel in Finloch, near Edinburgh?"

At the name of Finloch Miss Mac Craik, the wardress, gave a start.

"You are as entirely mistaken about me as you are about Colonel Forester," replied Frank. "There is evidently some confusion of persons in your mind. My brother tells me you first spoke of a Lieutenant Moore."

"Because that was the name by which you were introduced to me at Woolwich."

"I was so well known at Woolwich that it would have been highly imprudent to palm myself off under a wrong name there, Mrs. Field. If you had pointed me out to any soldier in the place he would have told you who I was."

"And was it likely I should appeal to a soldier for confirmation of the word of a gentleman," exclaimed Margaret, with a shrug. "Ah! you and Colonel Forester seem to be well versed in playing upon the credulity of unsuspecting girls! I believed you both, because I was not accustomed to deceit; and all I know is that, whether my husband married me under a true name or a false, our marriage at Finloch was stated to me to be valid by the law of Scotland, and I mean to claim it."

Again Miss Mac Craik gave a start and muttered something inaudibly.

"What do you say, Miss Mac Craik?" asked Michael, who was intently watching the scene.

"Aweel! there's nae such a toon as Finloch within twanty miles o' Eedingboro'," observed Miss Mac Craik, decidedly.

Margaret stood dumbfounded at this unexpected contradiction, and made a gesture of despair. The Dragoon was prompt to take advantage of the situation.

"You see, Mrs. Field, your narrative is breaking down in every point," he said, with cold politeness. "Believe me, you would do well to abandon a line of defence which can only make your case worse than it is. If you were to see the state in which you have placed Miss Graham, you would be moved, I trust, to repentance, and refrain from trying to do any more mischief. Every indulgence will, I am sure, be shown you at the trial, if you can dispossess yourself of fancies."

But Margaret would not let him proceed further. The pent-up indignation in her bosom burst forth in a sound which was half moan, half cry of fury.

"Ah, this is too much!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands, to prevent herself from gesticulating. "You are not content with destroying me, you must insult me with your odious language. But what have I ever done that you should persecute me in his way? I tell you before your brother's face, Captain Christy, that you have.

told shameful untruths; and I tell you before your own conscience that if your machinations against me succeed, you will have acted like a false-hearted coward."

"I have made no machinations, Mrs. Field. I wish you no harm, I assure you."

"You have planned my shame, but you will live to mourn the day when you did so. How, when, and where, the curse which I leave on you will take effect, Heaven only knows! but remember that on the day when truth breaks upon the plot which you have so cunningly woven for my ruin, others may show you mercy, I never will!"

And throwing him a look of implacable hatred, she darted from the room.

"She is a nice little termagant," laughed Frank, when the door had closed behind the two women. "Well, Mike, whose word do you believe now?"

"I do not know," answered the chaplain, with a sigh. "There is a mystery here which I cannot unravel. God will throw a light upon it in his own way."

Frank, did not think the occasion auspicious for inviting his brother to come to lunch at Gorsemoor. After talking a few minutes on indifferent subjects, he took his leave and walked out humming.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN-DOOR AMUSEMENTS.

He was not by any means satisfied with himself. A man may school himself to the belief that a lie is necessary, and not feel any the prouder after telling it. Frank had reddened at being called a coward by a woman; he was angry, and felt impatient to see Philip, that he might save his conscience by hearing his friend say that he had acted rightly.

Philip was quite as impatient to see him. As soon as the dog-cart which was conveying the Dragoon trotted through the gates of Gorsemoor Park, he descried it through the windows of the billiard-room. The gentlemen who were to have formed the shooting party were assembled there knocking the balls about owing to the persist-

ence of the rain, and Philip easily slipped out unperceived, and made for the front door.

"Wall?" said he, as Frank alighted, reeking wet, and shook himself.

Frank, standing under the portico, related everything that had happened, and called it a plaguety business. He said he had never seen Michael so perky before, but didn't care, and was inclined to let him do his worst.

"I have made up my mind as to what must be done," said Forester, with knitted brows. "Michael must be turned out of that chaplaincy!"

"How?"

"He's not a married man, and ought never to have been elected. Hugh Armstrong will manage the thing for us if you tell him that you want your brother to accept another living."

"Armstrong will suspect something unless we have another living ready to hand."

"I'll find one: it's not difficult. We can't afford to run risks."

"I think we had best let the thing slide," said Frank, opening his overcoat, and shaking some of the wet out. "Mike can't be sacked at a day's notice; the magistrates will have to wait till next Quarter Sessions, and after all I think it's safer for us to have him in the place than a stranger."

Forester shook his head. Frank had no fear of his own brother, but Philip had not such cause to rely on the chaplain's forbearance. There was also a difference in the characters of the two men; for whereas Frank was indolently prone to let a danger gather strength before coping with it, Philip was quick to check it at its source. He went on to say that he had been racking his head for some plan of communicating with Margaret, and urging submission upon her for her own sake, but had not been able to devise one. Then Frank mentioned what he had heard about Mrs. Baillie, the matron, and suggested that if she were as obliging as the Mrs. Baillie of old times, she might be used as an intermediary without there being any need to let her into secrets.

Forester approved, but they could not talk longer just then, for Hugh Armstrong appeared and asked them to come in. His hospitality was shocked at their staying out in the rain.

A pleasant fellow was Hugh Armstrong, a man of no talents, passions, whims, or weaknesses, but a perfect embodiment of all the virtues and prejudices of the modern squire. He had never distinguished himself in any way, but at school and college had earned the good opinion of his tutors and comrades by keeping up to the

best level of gentlemanly behaviour. His social religion was "good form;" he chose friends who were of "good form," and was justly severe upon persons who were original, emotional, noisy, or ill connected, for these things are "bad form."

The Armstrongs were one of the oldest families in the county, but Gorsemoor Hall was not more than a hundred and twenty years old. It had been built in the early Georgian era, when the family began to pass out of the lower ranks of the squirearchy to the upper. It was of red brick—square, ugly, and solid. Every successive owner had added something to it—the one a conservatory, another new stables; but no Armstrong had wasted his money on rare books or works of art. It was enough for them that they should encourage painters by having their full-length portraits done in oil when they married; and for the rest, they prided themselves on their cellar of wines, on their trees and sheep, and on the series of heiresses whom they had taken to wife.

The luncheon bell rang as Frank and Philip were led to the billiard-room; but when the door was opened loud sounds of merriment saluted their ears. Nelly Christy with two Misses Bunney, daughters of a neighbouring squire, and Miss Woodstock, the Admiral's daughter, were holding cues at arm's-length about four feet from the carpet, and half-a-dozen gentlemen in shirt sleeves were performing a steeple-chase over them. The foremost in the race was Dicky Bool of the 12th Dragoons, who had been at Harrow with Hugh Armstrong, and was a former friend of his; but Dicky in making a spurt caught his foot in one of the cues and rolled at Nelly's feet, which made the two Misses Bunney laugh till the tears ran out of their eyes.

"Come and jump, Frank," cried Nelly. "Quick; over you go, and you too, Mr. Armstrong."

"Oh, Frank's too big," exclaimed Dicky Bool, scrambling up.

"What's the prize?" asked Frank, and he receded for a start, but his fate was worse than the smaller Dragoon's, for he came down on all fours, causing the two Misses Bunney to cannon against each other, and driving Nelly into Bool's arms. Hereon the girls threw down their cues, and ran towards the dining-room convulsed with amusement.

Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong and Sir Wemyss Christy were waiting for the young people, and the board was spread with the substantial fare which is welcome when the weather precludes out-door pastimes, and makes of luncheon a valuable resource for time killing. There was a smoking tureen of ox-tail to begin with, whose odour was fragrance.

"Oh, I do so enjoy a rainy day now and then!" exclaimed Nelly, sitting down beside her cousin. "We'll have some more fun this afternoon; but you don't jump half so well as Mr. Bool."

"Bool is a capital fellow, and most accomplished. I am glad you appreciate him."

"I do, quite; but how comes he to be only a lieutenant when you will soon be a major, as he tells me?"

"Promotion doesn't go by merit in our corps, it goes by size. The smallest men are kept in the rear."

"So it seems; but I don't like the title of major; it makes one think of a corpulent old man with a red face, and cotton in his ears."

"I agree with you; corporal sounds much better."

"Yes, that or colonel; for if an officer gets his colonelship young it may be supposed that he has done some act of valour. I am sure Mr. Bool is very brave before the enemy!"

"Awfully. The size of him is enough to make them run."

Nelly glanced across the table to where Dicky Bool was making himself civil to the two Misses Bunney, and she had to bend over the plate to keep from laughing.

Lieutenant Bool was one of those dapper little men whose clothes are always tight, and whose faces never age. He had blue twinkling eyes, a fair moustache with long waxed tips, and he was neat as a new pin. Calm and small, lively as a cricket, ever ready with an answer, he was a favourite among ladies, but did not look much like putting a regiment of Russians to flight.

After luncheon there was an adjournment to one of the morning rooms, and Nelly proposed a game of "mufti." Twelve chairs were placed together, and Nelly sat down to the piano to play a *pot-pourri* of gallops. The company, who mustered thirteen, not counting the elders and Colonel Forester, who did not join, began running round and round the chairs, till the music suddenly stopping, everybody tried to plump down into a seat. One was perforce unsuccessful, and was placed *hors de combat*; then a chair was withdrawn and the game began afresh, the number of players gradually thinning off, until ultimately only two were left to compete for one seat. At this sport, requiring nimbleness, Frank was soon left out, but Dicky Bool struggled on till the end, having for his rival the younger Miss Bunney. Nelly played for a full two minutes to put them both out of breath, but when she ceased Dicky subsided into the chair fresh as paint, and Miss Bunney dropped panting on to his knees, whence she instantly rose with a squeal and a giggle amid general applause.

A girl like Nelly and a helpmate like Dicky Bool can keep fun going for hours. Then the two Misses Bunney were indefatigable; they were honest virgins, with red hands and cheeks pink as apples, who liked romping with the male sex because they thought it the chief privilege of being "out." After "Mufti" there was "General Post," and after that "Magic Music." Frank was put out of the room whilst a shilling was hidden in the coal-scuttle, and when he came in Nelly played now fast now slow to warn him when he "burned" or got away from the object. Frank found the coin at last, but blackened his fingers and wristbands in so doing. Then it was Hugh Armstrong's turn, and he was a long time espying the shilling at the bottom of a decanter full of water; but when Dicky Bool went out of the room Nelly hid the shilling in her hair, and made sure that it could never be discovered there. She played a dashing set of quadrilles, and it was good to see Lieutenant Dick prowl about mystified without the music ever slackening; while the Misses Bunney stuffed their handkerchiefs into their mouths to keep from exploding. But suddenly Dick caught the glint of silver beside the bow of blue ribbon in Nelly's hair; and, winking, he stole on tiptoe behind her. So deftly did he remove the shilling that Nelly only became aware of it by a general shout of laughter, and by Dick holding up the coin before her with an "Aha!"

"Oh, that's not fair!" she exclaimed, starting up with a little scream and a hand to her chignon. "Mr. Bool, you must have looked through the keyhole."

"No, honour bright, I played quite fair; 'pon my soul."

"Then you are cleverer than us all. There's no beating you."

"I think there was more merit in detecting the shilling in the water, as I did," laughed Hugh Armstrong.

"Or in the coal-scuttle where Captain Christy blackened his fingers," said Miss Woodstock, a tall dark girl of good-natured vivacity.

"No, no, Mr. Bool is the only magician among you," said Nelly.

"What shall we do now, Mr Bool? You shall decide."

"Let us have a carpet dance," suggested Dicky. "There are four of you young ladies, and no end of us partners. If Mrs. Armstrong will kindly play us some waltzes."

Mrs. Armstrong readily complied, and the room was cleared of tables, chairs, and knick-knacks. Dicky paired off with Nell, Hugh Armstrong took Miss Woodstock, and the Misses Bunney found partners in the persons of two noted young fox-hunters. Frank had to excuse himself for the present because his hands were soiled;

but he went out to wash them, and Philip Forester walked out with him.

Philip had been talking with Mr. Armstrong and Sir Wemyss Christy, and was in the impatient humour of a man who has been obliged to look on and laugh at fooleries whilst his thoughts are intent on grave matters. When they had been led to a dressing-room by one of the servants, he said he had sounded Mr. Armstrong and Sir Wemyss in a roundabout way as to removing Michael from the chaplaincy, and had found them both obtuse. The squire seemed glad to have got such a chaplain for the prison, and Sir Wemyss thought his nephew should be left to his own bent. So Philip saw nothing for it but to try and establish a communication with Margaret through the unsuspecting complicity of the prison matron.

"I must be going back to Fairdale now," he said. "I never like to remain long absent from Rose ; but I may count upon you to see Mrs. Baillie as soon as possible ?"

"All right, I'll go : it's a ticklish business, though," responded Frank, wiping his hands. "I wanted to get a word into Hugh's ear about quietly sacking Mike, but I couldn't come near him : he was so engrossed in those games."

"How much taken up he is with your cousin Nelly ! It looks as if he were a bit smitten in that quarter."

"I haven't noticed it," remarked Frank, a little startled. "What makes you think that ?"

"I don't know : perhaps it is only a fancy of mine," said Forester ; "but if I were you, Frank, and had any thoughts of settling down in life, I wouldn't let my cousin slip from me. She's a good-hearted little thing, and would soon get to like you, I imagine, if you give her any encouragement."

Frank stared, but the words sank deeper into his heart than his friend thought. He had been reflecting as he watched Nelly, full of animation and gaiety, that he had never seen her so winsome. He and his cousin had been as a brother and sister during her early girlhood, but there was ten years difference between their ages, so that she had been his pet rather than his playmate ; and now that he saw her more seldom than of old, he was better able to notice the increase in her attractions. It had not yet occurred to him that she was marriageable ; and he felt suddenly and unreasonably hurt to think of her becoming another man's wife—though why, he would have been at a loss to say, for he had never contemplated asking her to be Mrs. Christy, and was not yet prepared to do so at a moment's notice.

He went down-stairs musing that he did not much like Hugh Armstrong. Philip's little speech had put Margaret Field entirely into the background of his thoughts, and he could think for the moment only of Nelly.

The music had ceased when he returned to the drawing-room. He had been absent half-an-hour, and as the Misses Bunney were obliged to go home before dusk there had only been time for a couple of dances. This provoked him, for he was planning to have a waltz with Nelly, and cut out all her other partners, waltzing being one of his strongest points. Nelly was standing by the fire, chatting with Hugh and two of the other men; and the inexhaustible Dick Bool was seated at a table, alternately nibbling the end of a pen-holder, and writing some lines in a large album, with a face of deep solemnity. The sallies which Nelly and Hugh made to encourage him augured that he was writing verses, and so it proved.

"Why were you away so long, Frank?" exclaimed Nelly; "we must make you pay a forfeit. I have asked Mr. Bool to write some verses in my album, and you must do some too."

"I didn't know you were a poet, Dick," observed Frank, sarcastically.

"Bet I write as good doggerel as you," laughed Bool. "Bet Armstrong doesn't beat me either: just try, the pair of you."

"Oh, we yield you the palm," said Hugh.

"Mind, I have done it on compulsion," protested Dick Bool. "They're the first I've tried in my life, but such as they are I offer them with my duty, Miss Christy," saying which he grinned and presented the album to Nelly with a bow.

Dick Bool's writing was like everything else he did, extremely neat. It resembled copperplate. Thus ran his maiden attempt at versification:—

TO A BROWN-EYED FAIRY.

THOUGH the weather now is misty,
And the breezes rather cool,
Yet the sunshine of Nell Christy
Warms the heart of Richard Bool.

As a verse-wright I'm not tricky,
Yet in rhymes I'll try to tell
How the listening ear of Dicky
Hangs upon the words of Nell.

Speak then, Beauty, and inspire me—
Just one word, and just one laugh!
Drown the noise of friends who tire me
With their ceaseless, heavy chaff.

Yet I care not ; for I know it
Is but envy makes them sneer.
Who would not become a poet,
Were he Nelly's cavalier ?

"Oh !" ejaculated Nelly, as she read these lines to herself, and closed the album with a blush and a laugh. "Why, they're much too good, Mr. Bool ; you are most gallant."

"Let us see them. Has he talked about the moon ?" asked Hugh Armstrong.

"No ; they must be kept a secret," said Nelly ; but she abandoned the album, nevertheless, and Hugh read the ode aloud in an astonished voice.

"Why, it's a regular declaration," he said ; and Frank noticed that his merriment became rather wry.

"Dicky as a cavalier would be a fine notion !" grinned one of the fox-hunters.

"Oh, if you go and shy stones at my Pegasus he'll bolt," laughed Dicky ; and he beat a retreat.

"Well, gentlemen, you can, all of you, be equal with Mr. Bool by writing me a declaration apiece," said Nelly ; "only, mind, your verses must be as good as his."

She went away then to see the Misses Bunney off ; but presently returned, and Frank was alone with her a moment. Her cheeks were still flushed from amusement : "What a funny person Mr. Bool is," she ejaculated ; "I have never met such a nice Dragoon as he."

"Awful cheek his addressing you as Nelly," growled Frank.

"Why ? you call me Nelly, don't you ?" said Nell, looking up ; "besides it's in poetry, so there's no harm."

"I am your cousin, and it seems to me that I have a right which Bool hasn't."

"Mr. Bool is a friend, and I know some friends who are nicer than cousins. He has made himself agreeable all day, while you were most grumpy."

"I didn't know I was grumpy."

"Oh, yes ; and listless and abstracted, just as if you had something on your mind ; but Mr. Bool was charming, and he has promised to get up a garrison ball, to which I mean to go with papa."

"He seems to have quite taken your fancy by cutting his capers."

"He doesn't cut capers, but dances to perfection," said Nelly

with spirit; "and I do like an officer who is good-tempered, amiable, and anxious to please—a thorough gentleman in fact."

Frank was furious. It would not have been pleasant to have Hugh Armstrong for a rival, but it was harder to stomach Dicky Bool; and now it seemed to him that Philip must have been mistaken, and that it was Bool, not the heir of Gorsemoor, who was making strongest love to his cousin. The Dragoon's temper was not improved when his brother in arms came to ask him for a lift back to Tolminster in his dog-cart. Frank drove viciously all the way, and he was prepared to give waspish replies to any remarks Bool might have made; but Dicky sat silent and pensive while the rain whipped his face. It was not till near the journey's end that he observed with a sigh—

"What a delightful girl your cousin, Miss Christy, is, Frank?"

"You think so?" said Frank, in a peevish tone.

"Egad, yes; and it's funny, aint it? I never rhymed a line till to-day, and now I find lots of verses bubbling up in my head."

"Verses about my cousin?"

"On her name, at all events—it's such a pretty and easy word to rhyme to—Nelly!"

Frank gave his horse a smart cut. It was flashing upon him, that not only was Nelly comely and loveable, but that she was rich, and that if he married her he would be relieved of his pecuniary embarrassments, make a fresh start in life, and be happily quit of the tedious round of dissipations which had ceased to give him any pleasure. And thus musing he loathed Bool.

CHAPTER XIV.

CELL F. 1. 15.

AFTER leaving the chaplain's room, Margaret Field had returned to her cell. She was in a state of exasperated agitation.

She could not cry, but clenched her frail hands, muttering inaudible things, till the violence of her passion drove all the blood to her head, causing her temples to throb with acute physical pain. Thinking she was going to have an apoplectic seizure, she pressed her hands to her brow and sank on to her stool, emitting a low wail

like that which must have been wrung out in old times by the torture of the tourniquet.

Poor woman! After Frank Christy's unblushing denial of his own identity her plight seemed hopeless enough. It meant inevitable consignment to ignominy. There would have been absurdity in expecting the chaplain to weigh her uncorroborated statements against the oath of his own brother; and yet if he abandoned her what chance of escape had she from the snares of her enemies?

As she crouched in her cell the fate in store for her presented itself in a series of hideous visions—the long sentence pronounced by an indignant judge in a crowded court; the infamous livery of the prison; the transfer to some convict establishment with handcuffs on her wrists; and then years and years of the slavish work which she had seen done in this gaol, where the women were always up to their elbows in soap-suds, or on their knees scrubbing passages and staircases! Already the loathing of prison life was so strong in Margaret, that death by her own hand seemed preferable to a continuance of such degradation, so that mingling with her presentiments as to the future, came many of those wild thoughts that will pass through the minds of the despairing.

Presently a key was turned sharply in her lock, and Miss Mac Craik called out to her to come into the passage. Michael was there. He had wished not to let an hour elapse without assuring her that he still believed her story—that he would remain her friend.

She panted when she saw him so grave and sad. Her first thought was that he had come to reproach her for having deceived him.

"I am sorry for what has happened, Mrs. Field," he said pathetically; "but truth must prevail in the end. Nothing can hide it long. So do not be cast down by this trial, sharp as it is."

"You do believe, then, that your brother basely perjured himself?" she asked, fixing her haggard eyes on him.

"I believe that you are being wronged," he replied, hesitating; "that is why I implore you to strengthen my hands, and no longer to hide your past life from me, seeing that it may afford some clue by which to establish your defence."

"If you mean that I should tell you about my parentage, you have had my answer once," said she, obdurately, and with lips firm set; "nothing shall induce me to do so—nothing!"

"But is that a proper feeling?" remonstrated Michael. "If, as I understand, you are sorry to have given pain to your father and mother, is it not your duty to submit yourself to their affectionate reproof—would you not prove your repentance by so doing?"

"You seem to think my own feelings alone are in question," exclaimed Margaret, impetuously. "Cannot you understand that if my father and mother were to see me here without being able to release me it would break their hearts? Imagine their standing by and seeing me condemned to penal servitude as a murderess! Better they should believe me dead than to have to endure that!"

Michael was touched. He was so full of the misery of this awful case that he could not blame Margaret for her reluctance to drag any one whom she loved into it, even to assist her. Yet he thought it wondrous stoicism in a woman.

"Well, then, would you mind writing out for me as much of your history as I may know?" he said, after a pause; and he explained that he should like a succinct narrative of her journey to Scotland with Colonel Forester, the names of the places where they had stayed together, and the circumstances of their separation. If he were furnished with these particulars he would cause inquiries to be set afoot, and should Margaret's assertions be substantiated in any essential point, that would go far to confute her enemies. He spoke as earnestly as if his own brother were not chief among these enemies.

"Very well; I will write out all I can recollect," said Margaret, coldly. "Not to-day, perhaps, for my head is dizzy."

"Do nothing to overtask yourself; only try to remember all you can, for it will need all our combined wits to foil this conspiracy—though we *shall* foil it in good time."

"Conspiracy, indeed!" echoed Margaret, bitterly.

She was seated side-ways on a Windsor chair, her hands clasped over the back of it, and her chin resting on her fingers, in an abandoned attitude. Suddenly she broke out:

"Do you know it is very lucky for you, Mr. Christy, that I do not bring my relatives to my succour, for if I did they would drag your brother to his knees. They would take no rest till justice was executed on him."

"I can imagine their anger would be great," said Michael, quaking; "but I do not the less entreat you to appeal to them—they are your natural guardians."

"No; you may console yourself by thinking that your brother is safe, at least for the present. But I give you good warning that if I obtain my release I will bring him to a hard account, for I hold him more to blame than Colonel Forester. I am convinced it was he who instigated my husband to desert me; and if I had killed Miss Graham, her blood would have lain upon his head, not mine. So be under no delusion as to what you risk by assisting me!"

"I will stand by you so long as I believe in your guiltlessness, Mrs. Field ; and leave the consequences to God."

"Very well, we shall see ; but do not come to me some morning and say that you will only continue your assistance if you obtain your brother's pardon of me, for I will subscribe to no such condition ; and do not ask me to forego any of my claims upon Colonel Forester, for I will agree to nothing less than to be acknowledged as his wife, with all my rights. You see I make no concealment of my purpose, though I know my fate is in your hands, and if you choose to betray me, as your brother has done, you may as well do it without going further."

"You are not in my hands, Mrs. Field, and it would serve me nothing to betray you," said Michael, bending upon her a glance at once dignified and compassionate. "Remember what the Psalmist wrote in a time of as great distress as yours : 'Plead my cause, O God, with them that strive with me, and fight against them that fight against me.' Our Maker will not suffer you to fall if you put your trust in Him Who is stronger than us all."

"God has suffered me to be persecuted thus far," said Margaret. "I have been tormented for years, and see no justice in it."

She turned away from his consoling words with something of contempt, and went into her cell. She felt too much outraged for any common-place maxim of religion to soothe her. But she was a woman, tender, impressionable, nervous ; so that when she had closed her door some of the serenity of Michael Christy did fall upon her hardened spirit, and gradually melted it. She reflected that, after all, this man believed in her when nobody else did—that he had promised to befriend her and that he had borne her upbraidings without a look of reproach. Then she burst into tears, and remained sobbing in that dreary cell of hers for hours.

The cell which Margaret occupied was number 15 in the 1st ward of the female wing. In gaols prisoners are not alluded to by their names, but always by numbers. Margaret's full style and title was "F. 1. 15."

The cell was twelve feet long by eight broad, whitewashed and floored with dark red tiles. It was furnished with a small deal table and a three-legged stool, an iron washing-basin fixed to the wall, and provided with water-tap and escape-pipes. There was also a three-shelf cupboard, without a door, which was hung up in an angle of the cell, and held the following articles—a tin dinner-plate, an earthenware pint-mug, a salt-cellar, a wooden spoon, a twopenny comb, and a comb-cleaner. From a row of brass-headed nails, driven into the right-hand wall as you entered, hung a copy of the

prison rules (a placard on cardboard about a yard square), two forms of prayer for morning and evening, the round brass plate which a prisoner must carry with him or her when outside the cell, and a card bearing the particulars of the prisoner's age, offence, and date of entry into the gaol. In the case of untried prisoners there are blanks opposite the words, "WHEN CONVICTED," "SENTENCE," and "EXPIRATION OF IMPRISONMENT." The entries on Margaret's card were: "AGE: 24. OFFENCE: *Attempting to commit murder.*"

Cell 15 was lighted, like all the others, by a long narrow window, six feet by one foot and a half, barred outside and filled up with small panes of fluted glass. It was placed just under the ceiling, so that a prisoner could only look through it by climbing on to the stool; but it was of no use looking unless a crack were effected in the corner of a pane, for the fluting rendered the glass semiopaque, and shut out all vision of sky and trees. On fine moonlit nights the temptation to gaze on the beauty of the heavens becomes so strong to captives who love nature, that a prisoner who has been long in confinement will sometimes deliberately knock out a pane of glass, and pay by two days of bread-and-water diet for the luxury of a few hours' planet-staring. One poor wretch at Tolminster had done this so often that Mr. Armstrong ordered him a flogging. As they were tying him up to the post he remarked that he had nothing to say against being flogged—his only regret was that five minutes after he had broken his window the moon was veiled by rain-clouds, so that he had got himself into trouble for no purpose. After dark and before sunrise during the winter months, the cells are lighted each by a gas-burner, which a warder turns off and on by means of a cock placed, not in the cell itself, but outside the door. The gas-burner is set at a height of no more than four feet from the floor, so that prisoners may not be tempted to hang themselves from the piping, but this and other precautions against suicide serve little when captives are resolutely bent on making away with their lives. The favourite mode of exit from the overpowering monotony of gaol life is strangulation in a sitting posture by means of a hammock-strap or handkerchief, twisted round the iron rings in the wall to which the hammock-hooks are suspended at night; but some prisoners attempt to suffocate themselves by setting fire to their bedding and filling their cells with smoke. Others try (though very seldom with fatal effect) to produce a gas explosion. One man had become legendary at Tolminster from the diabolical craft he showed in carrying out a design of this sort. It was during winter, and as he was not a hard-labour man, and had consequently no picked oakum to give out at eight o'clock, he was safe from intrusion from supper-hour

at six until bed-time at ten. As soon as his gruel had been handed in to him, he heated one of his hammock-hooks till it was red-hot, melted a large hole into his leaden piping, and then blew out his burner, thereby producing an escape of gas, which he suffered to continue for three hours and a-half. At half-past nine, being by that time nearly stifled by the effluvium, he rang his bell and told the warder that he had blown out his gas by sneezing over it. Such accidents being common, a lighted match was passed to him through the trap-door, and an explosion instantly followed, which wrecked the man's own cell, the one above it, and the two contiguous ones, and killed him on the spot, besides maiming a couple of other prisoners and the warder. Such catastrophes are impossible, however, if the night warders will but do their duty in going round from time to time and glancing through the peep-holes to see that the cells are properly lighted. If a prisoner remains a single minute in the dark without ringing, it is obvious that he means mischief, and should be reported.

We have mentioned hammocks:—they are of cocoa-nut matting, and during the day stand rolled up and strapped with the mattress, sheets, and blankets inside them on the top of the cell-cupboard. Untried prisoners may have a bed by paying for it, and the possession of money to fee the warders will also secure them the privilege of going to rest and getting up at what hours they please, besides having all the menial work of their cells done for them. It would be an error to suppose that the influence of money ceases at the prison-gates. Even in the case of prisoners under sentence it procures them numerous alleviations and dietary indulgences; surreptitious loans of newspapers, tipping of wine and spirits, smoking of tobacco, and the facility of unrestricted correspondence with their friends. Warders risk a fine of £20, three months' imprisonment, and a loss of all pension rights if detected conveying prohibited articles to prisoners, or acting as postmen on their behalf; but the running of such risks constitutes the perquisites of their profession, and the risks are minimized by the fact that all the warders being interested in perpetuating the system of illicit gains stand together and tell no tales. For a detection to occur it would need that the governor or his deputy should suddenly pounce into a cell, and catch a prisoner in *flagrante delicto*, but the cunning which a prison develops in its inmates renders such accidents extremely rare, so that warders, male or female, will seldom refuse to "play the friend" towards prisoners who have connections outside willing to pay liberally for a transmission of letters, and to remit money for disbursements in dainties.

Untried prisoners without money, however, are treated with little more consideration than convicted felons in such impecunious plight. Not only must they get out of bed at five or six, according to the season, and wait before going to rest until the hammock-bell rings, but they must do all the dirty work of their cells, scrub the floor, wash the table and cupboards, polish the brasses, and clean out their various utensils.

It is only fair to say, that if this grievance have not called for greater public animadversion than it has done, it is partly because the majority of prisoners belong to a class who think it no hardship to clean out their cells, and because others who are not accustomed to menial work are yet content to do it for the sake of killing time. The hours drag on with such leaden weight during the long months which have sometimes to be passed awaiting trial,¹ that many prisoners will beg as a favour to have oakum given them to pick; whilst others will thankfully accept a broom or a hoe, with a commission to go and sweep out passages or scrape in the prison grounds. But all are not thus minded; and Margaret Field suffered atrociously from the drudgery which she had been compelled to perform before Michael Christy succeeded to the chaplaincy.

During her first three months in gaol, her daily life had been thus ordered:—She was awoken at five o'clock by the clanging of a bell, and in a minute or two Miss Mac Craik came to unlock her door, and threw it wide open. Though generally fatigued from having been unable to sleep during the first hours of the night, Margaret was obliged to creep out of her hammock, walk bare-footed across the tiled floor, and draw in her stool and clothes, which like other prisoners she was made to put outside her door at bed-time. Then she dressed, unhooked her hammock, rolled it up with its bedding, and lifted it to the top of the cupboard; a wearying, and even distressing, task to a person in her weak and feverish condition. At six o'clock, twice a week, Miss Mac Craik opened the door again and set down a pail of cold water, with a scrubbing-brush and flannel, generally adding the hint to "be quaiick noo." During the next hour Margaret was working on her knees, and with bare arms, splashing, scrubbing, and often gasping over a task which she could seldom perform so as to please the fastidious eye of Mrs. Baillie, who seemed to have a Dutch notion that floors ought

¹ Better arrangements in the judicature, and the greater frequency of assizes by grouping several counties together for the purposes of gaol delivery, have, since 1876, done away with the hardship of prisoners having to wait eight or nine months for their trial. But under the best possible arrangements prisoners must still lie committed sometimes during three or four months.

to be in a condition to serve as eating-plates. On the mornings when the pail was not brought the interval before breakfast had to be spent in polishing brasses and irons—to wit, the gas-burner, water-tap, pipe-rings, nail-heads, hammock-rings, and the brass numbered plate for wearing. Women prisoners are generally very zealous in furbishing this last-named article, for it serves them as a looking-glass. They have no other. If Margaret had been careful as to her personal appearance she would have found it impossible to dress her hair properly.

At eight o'clock bell-ringing again for breakfast. The trap in the door was opened, Miss Mac Craik pushed in the day's allowance of bread—18 ounces—and asked for the pint-mug, which she filled with steaming oat-meal gruel. In all county prisons the food is excellent in quality, but none save a Scotchman or an habitual gaol-bird can swallow with relish that insipid mixture of oat-meal, hot water, and salt, whose slang name is "skillee." Margaret never touched it, and breakfasted off a crust of bread.

From eight until twelve the prisoner had nothing to do but to sit on the three-legged stool, alone with her thoughts. Mrs. Baillie had, as we know, offered her needle-work under the form of male prisoners' shirts and socks to mend, but Margaret had never been able to give her thoughts to this employment, and, after one or two attempts, it was withdrawn from her, the matron being no friend to careless stitches.

Margaret might have had some books from the lending library had she cared for them; but Mr. Jabbot and his worthy acolyte, Mr. Barker, the schoolmaster and librarian, had allowed the books to fall into rags, and never applied to the visiting justices for grants in order to buy new ones, because had they done so, they must have been put to trouble in selecting suitable works, and in cataloguing, numbering, and covering them with brown paper when bought. Mr. Barker was even more averse to such hard labour than Mr. Jabbot, for having never been kept to his duty by the chaplain, he passed most of his time in practising the ophicleide with the Tolminster rifle corps band, whose pride and ornament he was. The books in his library consisted mostly of battered volumes of the 'Leisure Hour,' 'The Cottager's Friend,' 'Tracts for the Sorrowful,' and Temperance Stories—wholesome literature in its way, but which did not commend itself to a person in Margaret's frame of mind. Thinking he had a case of exceptionable stubbornness to deal with in Margaret Field, Mr. Jabbot had thought it in good taste to present her, through Miss Mac Craik, with a copy of 'The Prisoner's Guide to Repentance,' but she had scandalized the

staid Scottish girl by flinging this production out of her cell, and had added further scandal by refusing to attend the chapel services. The reason of this was that the horror of the gaol chapel worked too much upon her nerves. She had been to the service on her first Sunday, but finding herself locked up in one of those dreary boxes she had a fit of hysterics.

At twelve o'clock dinner-hour arrived. Three times a week the prisoner had a pint of soup made of barley, onions, potatoes, and meat, so thick that the wooden spoon could almost stand upright in it; on the other four days the fare was three ounces of Australian boiled beef, and half a pound of potatoes in their jackets. This *menu* never varied summer or winter. The only difference made in favour of prisoners sentenced for terms exceeding six months was that they had one pound of potatoes instead of half a pound, and on soup days a pint of weak milkless cocoa for breakfast instead of gruel. Prisoners sentenced for less than three months ate meat only once a week; and those committed for twenty-one days, or less, were restricted to two pints of gruel and one pound of bread *per diem*, with a pint of soup once a week. As these scales of dietary have been fixed by competent medical men, and approved by a Secretary of State, it must be taken for granted that they are found sufficient for nourishment: but it is certain that prisoners do not fatten in gaol.

After dinner Margaret had to wash up her soup-tin, spoon, and plate, brush up her bread-crumbs with a hand-broom so that none of them littered the floor; and at one o'clock she would be summoned out for an hour's exercise in the airing-yard. When prisoners are numerous they walk round and round a flagged court at distances of five feet from one another, and under the eye of a warder, who keeps them briskly on the move, orders them when to halt, and so forth. But in a female wing, where there are not many inmates, and where the exercise-prisoners do not exceed half-a-dozen (those sentenced to hard labour take exercise only once a week), they are generally let out singly at different hours of the day. Margaret was simply turned out into the open air and left to wander about unwatched.

This was the happiest hour of her day, for although the yard was a bleak, paved place, flanked on one side by the gaol, and surrounded on the three others by high walls of grey flint-stone, she could see above the walls the leafy chestnut trees of the chaplain's garden, and watch the clouds rolling in snowy masses under the sky-vault of limpid blue. The fresh atmosphere was in itself a luxury. On sunny days the air would be filled with larks circling aloft and flying upwards and upwards almost out of sight, though their

carolling notes remained audible when they themselves had become floating specks ; or, flocks of cawing rooks would spread themselves overhead, travelling from park to park, where they had homes that had been unmolested for centuries ; or, with swift headlong flight, some marauding hawk would cleave the air, startling all the smaller birds, who sought refuge twittering among the tree branches, or in the eaves of the prison, where they nestled snugly in the shadow of tall chimney-stacks. Then there were sounds which recalled to the prisoner the life of the great world beyond—sounds which fall unnoticed on the ears of the free. The melody of distant church-bells, the puffing of a steam reaping-machine in neighbouring fields, the piercing whistle of passing trains, the faint gun-cracks of sportsmen shooting partridges far away ; and now and then some unaccustomed noise, as when, one day, a strolling circus company entered Tolminster, and rode processionally by the prison-gates, pounding music, in a pestle-and-mortar fashion, out of big drums and trombones. All these echoes, whether grave or gay, touch in a prisoner some chord of memory, which vibrates through the whole being, wringing tears from the eyes, or causing the arms to droop in abject despondency. But if, following a train of thought drawn out by invisible links from the present to the past, Margaret could forget for a moment where she was, she had only to glance at the walls, profusely scrawled over with the inscriptions of other captives, to remember that she was in a prison.

Punish prisoners as you may, it is impossible to prevent them from scribbling whenever and wherever they may have the chance. They are deprived of writing materials lest they should pass notes to one another to brew mutinies ; and they dare not deface the whitewashed walls of their cells, because the so-doing would lead to immediate detection. But leave them alone for five minutes in a yard or workshop, and they will pick up the first thing that comes to hand—rusty nail, bit of coal, or sharp pebble—and write with it.

They write principally about the sentences which they are undergoing. The irresistible propensity of human beings to hold communion with their fellows, added to the no less tempting proclivity to break the rules which hold them tongue-tied, leads captives to perpetuate a record of what they themselves have borne, for the encouragement or amusement of fellow-sufferers. Most of the inscriptions are of this kind : “ *Done 60 days, 30 more to do ;* ” “ *Roll on 1870 ;* ” “ *Cheer up—Pick¹ won’t last.* ” Some prisoners write, with a cynical bravery, their full names and offence, as—

¹ Oakum-picking.

"Jane Hobson, six weeks for priggish a shawl. Done 35 days—out next week;" or break out into menaces against their prosecutors, as—"Old Butt, who swore against me, told a heap of lies—I'll be even with him. J. M.;" or again scrawl cabalistic messages that will be readable to the eyes of confederates, likewise in bonds, as—"X. X. X. 3. 42. ≡ . . ." Margaret found several amorous declarations, such as—"Sally Jones loves Bill Barton." But who was the prisoner who had scratched in shaky letters upon the black surface of one of the imbedded flints: "*The way of transgressors is hard*"?

After her hour in the airing-yard, Margaret had but three more events to look forward to for the breaking of the seven hours' monotony that must intervene till bed-time. At five o'clock the governor came round on his daily inspection, attended by Mrs. Baillie, who opened the cell-doors. The prisoner had to present herself in the doorway, and in reply to Captain Keyser's hurried question, "*Anything to say?*" generally answered by a shake of the head. This was the first event; the second was the supper distribution, at six o'clock, of gruel which she never ate, but was compelled to accept nevertheless; and the third was an evening's visit of two minutes' duration from Mrs. Baillie. The matron usually came in to remonstrate with Margaret about the untouched gruel; she inquired about her health, cast a searching glance round her to see that all things in the cell were in their proper places, and commonly wound up by the benevolent observation that it was of no use to fret.

Mrs. Baillie, as we have once said, was not a hard woman, but she was not a soft one either. No tale of prisoners' woes had ever drawn tears from her eyes, yet she was not addicted to tyrannizing. So long as her charges were clean, tidy in their persons, civil-spoken, and did the work that was set them without more than the necessary amount of bungling, she treated them with the same forbearance which a good-tempered lady shows to her servants. Even when they were unruly, as was sometimes the case with new-comers, she took pains to explain them their duties in a lucid, firm way; and found one look of hers more effectual than punishment. She never talked with the prisoners, nagged at them, or tried to pry into their secrets; she kept altogether aloof from their concerns, like a lady as she was, and was much respected in consequence. Barby Haggitt, *alias* "One," who did all her domestic work, and acted as her maid, was the only prisoner towards whom she unbent a little, and Barby looked upon her as the pleasantest mistress she had ever served.

Now, between Mrs. Baillie and Margaret Field there had never existed much good feeling, nor could there subsist any. A matron of the ordinary type, underbred, inquisitive, and garrulous, might

have insinuated herself into the afflicted prisoner's confidence, and struck up a sort of intimacy with her. There was enough of mystery in Margaret's case to excite the curiosity of most matrons; but Mrs. Baillie, though she could discern that "Fifteen" was a person of good education and lady-like habits, was for that very reason more wary in her dealings with her. Irrespective of any question as to Margaret's innocence or guilt, it did not suit the matron to make friends with a person, who in a few months might be reduced to the condition of an ordinary convicted prisoner, and might prove unmanageable if she had been encouraged to take liberties.

It was therefore with considerable compunction that Mrs. Baillie observed the footing on which "Fifteen" had been placed since Mr. Christy's arrival in the prison.

For Michael had wrought a complete change in the prisoner's life; all the details that have just been given as to her first three months in gaol had been greatly modified for her comfort. Margaret now had a bed instead of a hammock, an arm-chair, a looking-glass, entertaining books, and illustrated periodicals. Her meals were brought to her from an hotel in the town, tea was made for her in the prison whenever she wanted it; and all her menial work was done for her by Barby Haggitt. Captain Keyser had issued an order to this effect, and the matron had only to obey.

After all Margaret only enjoyed the comforts which every untried prisoner might claim by paying for them, and the governor had transgressed no rule in directing her to be entered on the books as a prisoner "who maintained herself." Where the money came from it was not his business to ask. Dr. Hardy was still less concerned on this head, but wishing to please Michael (who did not wish Margaret to feel under any obligations to him), he gave the prisoner to understand that the changes in her diet had been accomplished by his direction. This Margaret believed, knowing little how prison commissariats were conducted; and the statement was true to this extent, that the Doctor was well content to see "Fifteen" provided with food which she could eat, and which was visibly restoring her to health. He liked to see all his prisoners healthy.

But to Mrs. Baillie's mind the chaplain was going a great deal too far. Perhaps she could have overlooked the food and attendance questions, which were trifles, but it disturbed her equanimity to see that Michael held conversation of an hour's length, day after day, with the prisoner. What could he find to interest him so vastly in this commonplace little woman of criminal antecedents, whereas he passed by her—the matron—with only a few conventional words

and a bow? Mrs. Baillie could not believe that it was mere anxiety as to the trustworthiness of the prisoner's assertions about Captain Christy which accounted for these long conferences: for such a question as this, thought she, must have been settled in the affirmative or negative in a couple of interviews. Her interest being aroused, she had watched the two closely more than once, and had remarked, that as Margaret's health came back to her she was becoming pretty. And when Mrs Baillie's eyes had opened to this fact she began to feel a subtle, but gradually increasing, antipathy towards the prisoner.

CHAPTER XV.

A SLIP OF THE TONGUE.

MRS. BAILLIE had not been present at the scene between Margaret and Frank Christy. It happened that she had gone to some borough Quarter Sessions in a neighbouring county to give evidence as to the previous conviction of a prisoner; and she was not back from this professional trip till evening. On her return Miss Mac Craik informed her of what had occurred, and added that there had been a subsequent "row" between Fifteen and the chaplain—Margaret being unusually violent, and he "meek as a lamb."

The matron, disliking rows, forbore to visit Fifteen that evening, but she went to her next morning between breakfast and chapel-time, and found her writing at her table. Margaret had been busy since daybreak inditing the narrative which the chaplain desired, and was not yet dressed. She sat wrapped in a gray dressing-gown, and her hair fell over her shoulders almost to her waist, without cap or ribbon to hold it. The cell presented an odd appearance of disorder, for since a bed and an arm-chair had been put into it, there was hardly room in which to turn round; and an open trunk, from which linen and dresses overflowed, added to the confusion.

"I understand you were much excited yesterday," said Mrs. Baillie, standing in the doorway, with a look of disapproval at the disorder. "Have you passed a good night?"

"Yes, thank you: I slept a little," answered Margaret, raising her eyes for an instant and lowering them again to her paper.

"You do wrong to put yourself into these passionate states,"

continued the matron, with an official sort of kindness. "Now that you have seen Captain Christy and heard him contradict your statements, it is to be hoped that you will calmly reason yourself out of your extraordinary ideas."

"Captain Christy has told untruths, that is all," rejoined Margaret.

"Anybody who knows Captain Christy, and I myself, who am slightly acquainted with him, will be loth to believe that," responded the matron, with a shake of the head. "However, I suppose it's not of much use arguing with you. Is there anything I can bring you—a little *sal volatile*?"

"Nothing; thank you. Would you please tell the chaplain that I should like to see him, and I will ask you to give him these pages which I have written."

Mrs. Baillie bit her lips.

"Prisoners have a right to send for the chaplain, I know," she said, with rising colour; "but if everybody made so many demands on Mr. Christy's time, as you do, he would be obliged to engage curates to help him."

"I make no demands on his time. Till now he has always come of his own accord," said Margaret, flushing, "and I trust mine is an exceptional case in the prison."

"All prisoners say that," retorted Mrs. Baillie, with asperity. "Do you *insist* upon the chaplain coming to see you?"

"I request you to convey him my message. He will please himself about coming."

"If I were in his place I should certainly not come," was the ungracious answer which the matron muttered rather than spoke; and taking the letter which Margaret had put into an envelope, she went out, wrenching her key spitefully in the double lock.

What incensed her was the right of proprietorship which the prisoner seemed to assert in the chaplain's time. It was intolerable that such a woman should give herself the air of summoning Mr. Christy at her pleasure, and appearing certain that he would come. However, the matron did not go straight to deliver Fifteen's message, for it was too near chapel time; and she had to put on her bonnet.

Since the new chaplain's arrival Mrs. Baillie had been somewhat particular as to her bonnets. Her Sunday one had passed into daily wear, and she had bought another for festivals. Barby Haggitt, while removing the breakfast things, watched her don a velvet head-dress with dark blue ribbons, and thought her beautiful; but marvelled a bit that she should take such elaborate pains with her

toilet for a mere prison chapel service. It was not as though all the male prisoners could see and admire her (Barby could have understood dressing finely for that), but the matron always drew the curtains of her pew and remained invisible except to the chaplain in his pulpit.

After chapel, when the women had been drafted back to their washing and ironing, there was some oakum to be fetched, and this again delayed Mrs. Baillie from carrying Margaret's note. Calling to "One" to shoulder a basket, she went out with her from the women's wing and descended into the underground regions occupied by the kitchen and store-rooms. Here, in a big, vaulted, brick chamber, that smelt of tar and sodden hemp, were piled mountains of old rope, coiled like boa constrictors; stacks of cut strands that looked like wood-faggots, and heaps of fluffy hemp, which was the oakum ready picked. The seeming faggots were bundles of rope prepared in sizes of a foot long for picking; and figures in chalk on the wall indicated the weights of the bundles in the different stacks—24 oz., 48 oz., and 64 oz. Few prisoners can get through more than 64 oz. in a day, and even this calls for ten hours unceasing labour at the hands of the inexperienced. The picked oakum ready for consignment to ship-builders, who use it for caulking the seams of vessels, was fine as carded wool; and a male prisoner, concealed behind one of the coils, was treading some of the stuff down into a flat tub to make it into cakes, like mill-stones, convenient for carting away.

Mrs. Baillie did not detect the presence of this man, and, thinking the place was empty, told Barby to fill her basket with bundles, while she went to the store-keeper's room for balls of blue; but Barby's quick ear had caught the sound of wheezing and treading, and the instant her mistress was gone she coughed. Out came the man barefoot and perspiring; and winked. The two prisoners had never seen each other before, but gaol-freemasonry at once established communion. Barby stood with mock shyness waiting for the man to speak first—which he did in a stage-whisper, croaking:—

"'Ow long are yer 'ere for?"

"Year and a 'arf, but I've done sixteen months," said Barby, almost proudly.

"Hell of a place, aint it, and the vittles is awfu'," whined the male. "I got six months for tying a choker,¹ but I've done four. My name's Tom Piper; what's yourn?"

"Barbara Haggit; but, I say, aint you the cove that got the 'cat'

¹ Highway robbery with violence—garotting.

t'other day?" saying which Barby eyed him from the brow of his cropped head to the end of his yellow and brown trousers with mocking curiosity.

"Ees—ecod, I did! but 'ow come you to hear of it. Did t' parson tell yer?"

"No, I read it in t' papers. I'm matron's servant, yer know—and the papers says yer hollared fit to bust yerself."

"I expex' yer'd hollar tew, if they took to skinning that back o' yourn. Was yer ever volloped at skule?"

"Yes, with a birch, oftener than I liked," said Barby with a laugh.

"Well, then, fancy yer was being vopped with a birch on yer back off which a mustard poultice had took all the skin fust—that's whot it feels like," remarked Tom Piper—"and not a blanked drop o' beer to keep up a cove's pecker after'uds, neether."

Barby Haggit's soft heart was touched, and she slipped a hand into her pocket. That receptacle always contained some scraps gleaned from Mrs. Baillie's table, or from Margaret's. The present investigation drew forth a wedge of red cheese, a crust of white bread, two lumps of sugar, and an Albert biscuit, and these were handed over to Tom Piper with a recommendation to hold his tongue about the matter. Tom swiftly inserted the goods into the bosom of his blue shirt, and muttered his gratitude.

"Thank yer, my dear. Them vittles keeps yer so low ye're hardly fit to fight a babby. I sweats over this oakum treading wuss than I ever did carryin' hods o' bricks up a ladder at midsummer."

"I'll bring you some more if yer comes to work here often," said compassionate Barby. "I gets more scraps than I knows what to do with. Are yer at this here job every day?"

"Ees; but if yer doan't find me here just slip the things under these coils of rope in t' corner, which woan't be cut up for another three months. Yer doan't get any liquor, do yer?" (This in a hushed, eager tone.)

"Yes, there's a lady in our place has sherry for dinner, and 'ardly touches it. I'll try to bring yer a bottle. But—here's the missis—get off—"

Tom Piper, quick to escape the eye of authority, slipped behind his ropes in a twinkling, and remained silent as a mouse. Barby began tumbling bundles of oakum into her basket as if she had been hard at work all the time.

"What? not done yet, 'One'? What a time you've been," observed Mrs. Baillie, coming in.

"Oh, mum, I was stopped by a rat—the biggest you ever see'd—long as my elbow, and I had to 'unt him all round the place."

"Br-r-r! and did you catch him?" asked Mrs. Baillie, with a shudder.

"No, mum, but he had a squeak for it, and only dodged me by buryin' hisself in the picked oakum. If yer'll let me fetch a broom I dessay I'll get at him."

"No, take up your basket and come along," said Mrs. Baillie, not ambitious of distinguishing herself by joining in a rat-hunt. Barby, laughing in her sleeve, caught up the heavy basket, containing almost a hundred-weight of rope's ends, and swung it over her shoulder as lightly as if it had been a bundle of clothes for the wash. She was one of those girls who can always get out of a scrape with their tongues, and derive a chuckling satisfaction from hoaxing their superiors.

When the oakum had been taken to the female wing—when the matron had given the balls of blue into the laundry, and listened to a complaint about the water being too hard, and scolded a prisoner for tearing the shirts she washed; when she had been informed that there was a leak in one of the cell water-pipes, and that one prisoner (known as a "shammer") had a sick headache and wanted leave to sling her hammock; and that another (an old stager) had cut her thumb so that she could neither wash nor pick oakum; when she had been called away to comfort Baby Dick, who had had a fall which raised a bump on his forehead, and necessitated an application of vinegar and brown paper externally, and some lollypops for inward use; when, in fact, Mrs. Baillie had disposed of the dozen little things which crop up whenever one has any pressing business on hand, she was at last free to carry Margaret's letter to the chaplain. But this was the hour when Michael habitually visited the prisoners who were employed at mat-making in their cells; and as he was absent from his office the matron laid the letter on his table.

Now, at this moment, Frank Christy arrived at the prison, ostensibly to see his brother, really to renew his acquaintance with Mrs. Baillie, and ingratiate himself with her for the purpose settled between him and Philip Forester.

The matron, who was passing down the office corridor, swinging her bunch of keys from a steel-chain, perceived him through the glass-door crossing the entrance-yard with the gate-porter. He was in undress uniform—blue braided frock coat with his China war-medal, and an enamelled white leather pouch-belt which denoted

that he was parade-officer for the week. The officer's widow thrilled at sight of the well-known regimentals, and easily recognized Frank, though she had not seen him for years:—"I wonder whether he will know *me* again," she mused, and instead of continuing her way, opened the door as though she were going out, so that she might appear to meet the Dragoon by accident. Her heart fluttered a little, for those indigo balls had stained her hands, and the worries in her wing had made her hot, so that she was afraid of not looking her best. Frank encountered her at the foot of the steps, and the recognition was immediate.

"How do you do, Mrs. Baillie?" he said, lifting one of his white gloves to his forage cap.

"So you have not forgotten my features, Captain Christy?" she replied, well-pleased, and mincing a little as she held out a hand, which, to her dismay, was blue all over.

"Faces like yours are not soon forgotten," he answered, with pleasant gallantry. "The truth is, though, my brother told me I should find an old acquaintance here."

"And what did you think on hearing that an officer's widow had become a prison matron?" (Mrs. Baillie regretted that she had not her Sunday bonnet on.)

"Can you ask? Of course I wished I were a prisoner in your custody."

"Oh, oh! you are still a great cajoler of ladies, Captain Christy!"

"No; only of pretty ones, I assure you. But tell me how you get on here. Are all your prisoners as fractious as the one I saw yesterday—Margaret Field?"

"No; it would be a pity if they were," said Mrs. Baillie, with a dry laugh. "She is one of the most disagreeable persons I have ever seen, and she behaved very offensively to you, did she not?"

"Yes, poor cracked woman! She swears I am a Lieutenant Moore, and my brother seemed half disposed to believe it, till we had her in for an interview, and your wardress caught her tripping in a number of bangles."

"Your brother is a very warm-hearted man, Captain Christy."

"So he is; and mighty fond of picking up people from the mud, and embracing them before they have dried themselves."

"Margaret Field is a pretty woman, too," added the matron, demurely.

"H'm—that's a matter of taste—a little skinny thing, wild as a vixen! But I suppose the good looks of a prisoner make no difference to a parson?"

"I don't know about that. Clergymen have hearts like other

people, and are likely to feel a greater interest in a woman who has a soft pair of eyes to plead with."

"Well, but—" said Frank, halting in the middle of the yard, and hitching his sword under his arm. "Well, but you don't mean to hint that my brother has really taken a fancy to Madge Hawthorne? That would be a queer start?"

"Her name is Hawthorne, is it?" interrupted Mrs. Baillie, quickly.

"Hawthorne? I don't know. I thought it was you who alluded to her by that name."

"No, we have all felt a great curiosity as to her real name, but she has constantly refused to disclose it."

"I suppose then she must have let it out yesterday in my brother's room, or else I'm mixing up names," said Frank, evasively; but he had reddened up to the roots of his hair.

He saw what an irremediable blunder he had committed in letting Margaret's name slip, and he lapsed silent. Mrs. Baillie threw him a glance of astonishment. For a moment he hesitated whether he had not better make a clean breast of it, explain his difficulties, and trust to the matron's fellow-feeling as an officer's wife to assist him; but certain recollections of Mrs. Baillie's having been a prim person stayed him, and induced him rather to brazen out his mistake. He perceived, however, that he could no longer beg any favour in respect of thwarting Margaret without exciting the matron's worst suspicions; and the consciousness of having failed in his embassy, made him feel at a loss for what he should say next. It was Mrs. Baillie who resumed the conversation.

"Of course, I don't really think Mr. Christy is smitten with Margaret Field. To begin with, he believes her to be a married woman."

"To be sure that might stop a parson," assented Frank, in a lame way. He was inwardly cursing his foolish tongue.

"He seems to have a firm faith in her innocence, though, and to some extent this places me in an awkward position," proceeded the matron, appearing not to notice his distress. "Supposing 'Fifteen' should be convicted, I can make no difference between her and other prisoners; and Mr. Christy may think me harsh. The chaplain is my superior, you see, and it would be a sorry thing for me if I offended him."

"Tut, tut, Mrs. Baillie, don't you believe that any man is your superior," said Frank, recovering some composure. "Why don't you make my brother fall in love with you? marry him, and settle your differences that way."

"Oh, you are making fun of me now, Captain Christy," ejaculated the matron, turning red as a ripe cherry.

"No. I'm quite serious, 'pon my word," said Frank, who suddenly perceived a new tack to go upon, and talked in a smiling way. "My brother is as shy as a kangaroo in a tail coat, and it would do him a world of good to have a wife like yourself, who would crumple the starch out of him. I know he thinks mighty well of you, for he told me so."

"I shall run away if you talk like that," said Mrs. Baillie, half laughing. But she did not run away.

"I, for my part, couldn't wish Mike a better keeper than you," continued Frank, as he reached the end of the yard, and paused again near the gate-way. "A chaplain must marry. They only elected Mike by mistake, thinking he had a wife; but I know his heart is an empty citadel, and you will find no obstacles if you try to hoist your pink colours on it. Good-bye for the present."

"But are you not going in to see your brother?" inquired Mrs. Baillie, with surprise, as the Dragoon held out his hand.

"No, I came to see you to-day."

"That's very flattering, and did you come to talk about this—this—little bit of nonsense?" continued the matron, willing to have her ears tickled a brief moment longer with the matrimonial subject.

"I mentioned it by the way, but quite in earnest, believe me," said Frank, slinging his sword to his belt-hook.

"Well, but such a thing never crossed my mind, Captain Christy; never, I assure you."

"Let it do so now, then. Better late than never, as the Bishop said when he got into paradise. Isn't Mike good-looking, pleasant-tempered, easy to manage; just the kind of fellow whom a clever woman like you could put through his paces?"

"Well, but what would your grand relatives say to such a match—Sir Wemyss Christy, and Miss Christy, and others!"

"They'd say nothing but what was jolly of you, if they took their cues from me, and would feel much pleased by having you for a sister-in-law; honour bright, Mrs. Baillie. Good-day again;" saying which, Frank made another military salute, shook the matron's hand, and turning, showed the brightness of his steel spurs as he departed.

He was satisfied that he had done all that in him lay to retrieve his mischievous slip of the tongue, for he had left Mrs. Baillie in good humour with him. At first he had meant absolutely nothing by this matrimonial hint. It was one of those complimentary

nothings—sugared *confetti*—that he was prone to pelt all young women with; but the flush that would not die from Mrs. Baillie's cheeks told him that his random shot had exploded a shell in the prison matron's small magazine of secrets. The thing would have made him laugh inwardly, if he had been in the mood for being amused; for Mrs. Baillie and Michael seemed to his mind an oddly assorted couple. But for the present it suited him well that the matron should feel an interest in his brother, and be jealous of Margaret—for she was the more certain to keep a vigilant look-out on the prisoner—and what things a vigilant, jealous woman can do, the Dragoon knew by experience.

Mrs. Baillie watched him leave the yard—stooping to walk through the postern, which was too small for his height, and then she returned to the prison—excited as a school-girl. But widows keep their wits about them even when agitated, and the matron wanted to ascertain whether Margaret had really revealed in the chaplain's presence that her name was Hawthorne? She had been more struck by Frank's *lapsus lingue* and evasions than she had shown at the time; and she at once repaired to the chaplain's room. Michael had just come in from visiting rounds, and was standing at his table, sorting the tracts which he distributed during his visits.

"I placed a letter from 'Fifteen' on your desk, Mr. Christy. Have you found it?" asked the matron, in the soft tone she always used in addressing the chaplain.

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Baillie—I am just going to read it."

"I was absent yesterday when Captain Christy saw Mrs. Field," continued the matron. "May I ask whether she disclosed anything about her antecedents—her real name?"

"No, she said nothing; and I am much perplexed by her reticence. I feel that her parents ought to be summoned to assist her. Have you ever made an attempt to question her?" added Michael, looking seriously into the matron's face, and wondering a little to see it so red. "Perhaps she might be more communicative to one of her own sex, if kindly pressed."

"I am afraid not; she never liked me."

"Oh, everybody likes you, Mrs. Baillie," answered Michael, not intending a compliment, but enouncing what he thought to be a fact.

Mrs. Baillie, with a leap at the heart, muttered that she would try to question Margaret, and beat a retreat. There was some confusion in her manner, and the instant she had left the room, her countenance fell woefully. She was persuaded that Frank Christy had deceived her—that he had known Margaret; and she dimly divined the miserable mass of trickeries and falsehood which Fifteen's perse-

cutors were endeavouring to keep from the world. It was a horrible revelation, for Mrs. Baillie was a woman of instinctive rectitude, and felt burdened by the weighty secret which had been so suddenly and accidentally thrown upon her.

But why did she not tell the chaplain that she had seen his brother, and inform him of the latter's damaging admission? Why did she not go immediately to Margaret's cell, inquire of her point-blank whether her name was Hawthorne, and judge by her expression what the truth was? Why, instead of that, did she waver for a full hour—skulking twice near the prisoner's door, holding out her key to put it in the lock, and twice recoiling from what was her plain duty? Was Mrs. Baillie truly jealous of Margaret? Did she hate her so much as to be unwilling to co-operate, even remotely, in the establishment of her innocence?

No; but she was afraid to compromise herself, and to no good purpose. The dinner-bell rang, and called her to her usual duties. She saw the beef and potatoes given out; went to inspect the washing; sorted the socks that had to be darned, and the shirts that lacked buttons; and then went to her own dinner, which she could not eat. Her cheeks were still flaming, and she would have liked to remain in her room a whole afternoon, and think as to what she ought to do. If she denounced Frank Christy's deception she would make an enemy of him, and perhaps the scandal that would result from the officer's exposure might force Michael Christy to leave the gaol. What would become then of her chance of marrying the chaplain?—of getting a new and happy settlement in life?

Mrs. Baillie would have been no true woman if she had not contemplated the possibility of marrying Michael Christy from the moment when she had heard that the latter was a bachelor. If she did not wed a prison official, she was likely to wear weeds all her life, for having accepted an office of quasi-domesticity for the sake of snug emoluments, she had dropped out of her own circle, and stood on the level of small tradesmen and confidential servants, from whose ranks she would never have accepted a husband. A clergyman was just the man for her, and Michael Christy of all men the best. She had had no time yet to love him—and, indeed, she had given her heart once and for all to the dashing Hussar whom she had loved and lost—but she was still capable of a very solid attachment for such a man as Michael Christy; and after what Frank had said, the match seemed not only possible, but probable. The only thing was to play her cards well—to be patient, and ingratiate herself with the chaplain by degrees—and, oh, how she wished at that moment that Margaret Field were well out of the

gaol, that Michael might no more be troubled with those wretched wrongs of hers, which kept his brow so dark !

Mrs. Baillie would not have compounded a felony for untold gold, but marriage is not gold, and she ended by convincing herself that to do nothing was best. She would let events work, and hold her counsel. But she felt guilty to a degree that alarmed her, and avoided going near Margaret as though ashamed. She went about her prison duties in a mechanical, brusque way, with pre-occupied looks ; and her heart thumped every time she heard the bell ring, and thought Michael might be coming into the ward to hold one of his long interviews with Margaret, whom she did hate now—worse and worse every hour.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRUTH STALKER.

MICHAEL had opened Margaret's letter and was perusing its contents with deep attention. It was written in a ladylike hand, very flowing, and many passages were underlined ; but the style was not exclamatory, and betokened more self-command than could have been expected, considering the circumstances under which it had been penned. There was truth and dignity on the face of it.

This is how it ran :—

“Sir,

“I will endeavour to give you, as briefly as possible, a narrative of the events which preceded and followed my marriage with Colonel Forester.

“I must begin by telling you that I was always a very romantic, foolish girl, and gave my parents a great deal of uneasiness by my whims. They bore kindly with me ; but latterly my father had espoused some religious views, which I presumed to think ridiculous, and which made me very wretched. One day I left home in a pet, having asked my mother's leave to accept the invitation of one of my former governesses who was ill at Woolwich, and who wanted me to stay a month with her. It was whilst I was living under her protection that I became acquainted with my future husband.

"Our meeting occurred one summer Sunday, when I had been to church alone. It rained as we were coming out, and he offered me the shelter of his umbrella. He had never been introduced to me, but he spoke politely, and was so evidently a gentleman, that I could not refuse his attention without looking prudish. He escorted me home, and told me, as we walked, that he was an artillery officer.

"After this we met several times by appointment—generally on Woolwich Common, or in my governess's garden. It was a lovely summer, and the evenings were delightful. I used to go and watch the officers playing cricket; or take a sketching-book into our garden and sit in an arbour, where he joined me, coming through a gate which opened on to the road, and which had only a latch. My governess *knew nothing* about this, for she was lying in bed all the time, and trusted me to go out alone—more than I deserved.

"Captain Field (as he called himself) soon proposed to me, but said we must keep our marriage secret *for a while*, lest it should cut him off from some property he was expecting; and he suggested that we should travel to Scotland, because the marriage formalities in that country were less difficult of accomplishment than in England, *though equally binding all over the kingdom*. I knew nothing of these matters. If he had told me that I must rush through the fire to become his wife I should have done it, for I worshipped the very ground on which he trod. Besides, at that time, my only choice lay between marrying Captain Field, or returning home to the insufferably irksome life from which I had fled; and such was my obstinate waywardness, that, even if I had not been engaged, I think I should have preferred hiring myself out as a shop-girl, rather than going back to live under my parents' control. As I was setting out for Edinburgh, I posted a letter to my father, telling him an untruth—that *I was going to America*—and concealing my husband's name: for I was afraid he would come to disturb my new home, by forcing my husband immediately to publish our marriage, which would have spoiled our plans. It was Captain Field who dictated the letter I wrote. By-and-by, when my husband deserted me, I was ashamed to go home and confess how I had been duped. To begin with I fell very ill, and lay fever-stricken for weeks, but as soon as I could move, I went out in search of employment, and found it in the milliner's shop, where I remained till my present misfortune befell me.

"That is the pith of my story, and now I must give you some details. It seems that I have been deceived as to the very name of the town where I was married, but I am positive the hotel where we

alighted was '*The Albany*,' for I recollect seeing the name in gold letters over the porch. It was a new hotel, of some size, which seemed to be frequented by tourists; and there was a view from the window of our sitting-room of the Frith of Forth, *not a mile off*. We enjoyed it from the balcony after dinner, in a beautiful moonlight, which made all the waters seem of silver; and your brother remarked that the Frith looked so near that he thought he could throw a stone into it from where he stood. Upon this, my husband said we should do better, in honour of our marriage, to throw a sovereign to some German bandsmen who were playing below; and he wrapped the money in a piece of paper, which I threw.

"Previous to our marriage, we had been lodging for three weeks at the Randolph Hotel, Princes' Street, Edinburgh, because of the Scottish law, which requires people to have resided twenty-one days in the country before they can be married. During that time, I believe I was entered on the hotel books as '*Mrs. Field*,' but I was not living with Captain Field *as his wife*. We had separate rooms; and he treated me with invariable respect. I knew it was improper to be travelling about with him like that, but I loved him too much to care, though I certainly did think it wretched to be married without bridesmaids, and not *inside a church*, like other English girls. I cannot conceive how your brother can have the wicked audacity to deny all I state, for he accompanied Colonel Forester and me when we went to buy the wedding-ring at a jeweller's shop near the Parliament House; and he was at great pains to explain to me that all Scotch people perform their weddings *in private houses*, and that in old days we might have been married by the Blacksmith, at Gretna, one minute only after crossing the Border. It was your brother who all along served to keep me in the belief that I was acting as countless other girls have done, so that I had no need to be ashamed; and it was he who, with Robert Dubois, my husband's valet, conducted our wedding. We stood up after dinner—Colonel Forester and I—and your brother said: '*Henry Field*, do you take this woman to be your *wedded wife*?' and the Colonel said, 'I do.' After this, he addressed me in like words, and I answered, 'I do;' then a ring was put on my finger, and your brother said, 'I pronounce you man and wife.' I noticed that he did not say, 'in God's name,' and thought it strange, but did not say so, concluding he had omitted the words from not being a clergyman. When the short ceremony was finished, we all signed two certificates, of which my husband and I each kept a copy. Your brother laughed, and said it was quicker to tie a knot than untie it; and I laughed too at the joke, but presently began to cry, for I felt it was a great step

I had taken—and yet I was unspeakably happy to think that I had a husband whom I adored, and to whom I could cling all my life.”

When he had reached this point of the letter, Michael Christy paused, and asked himself if there was anything in it that denoted falsehood or mental aberration? His answer was—nothing. The letter went on to treat of the events that followed the wedding-day. It seems that Margaret and her husband spent only one day at the Albany Hotel of “Finloch,” and then returned to Edinburgh, where “Mr. Moore,” i. e. Frank, left them. After that the wedded pair, attended by the man Dubois, rambled during six weeks over Scotland, and then, by easy stages, worked their way back to London. Their trip lasted altogether about three months, during which time they had stayed at some thirty different hotels. Margaret recollected the names of many among these, and had written them on a separate piece of paper.

Coming to the catastrophe of her brief wedded life—the period when Philip Forester had deserted her, Margaret wrote :

“We came back from our tour one Tuesday afternoon, in October, and arrived at the King’s Cross station. It was a rainy day, and my husband put me in a cab, saying he was going to his banker’s to draw some money, but would join me by dinner-time, at the lodgings he had hired for us at 200, E—— Street. *That was the last I saw of him*, for in the evening a commissionnaire brought a note, in which my husband stated, in hurried terms, that he had been summoned away to see his father, who was ill *in Essex*, but hoped to return in two days at the furthest. I had not the least suspicion of this being untrue, for there was no apparent premeditation in my husband’s desertion. I had brought his luggage to our lodgings with my own ; he had actually told me what things to order for dinner ; we had not had a quarrel ; and he parted with me on the most affectionate terms. I think I see him now, waving his hand to me and smiling, as the cab drove out of the station in the rain. In fact, I am persuaded that, at the time when we separated, Colonel Forester *had no intention of deserting me*, and was only induced to do so by the advice of bad-hearted friends.

“However that may be, a letter came to me in two days bearing the Colchester post-mark, and giving a melancholy account of Mr. Field’s supposed illness ; and similar missives continued to arrive intermittently during the next fortnight. At last, one day, a letter was delivered, with a deep mourning border. I was out shopping when it came, and found it lying on the table upon my return. I guessed

my father-in-law must be dead, but was quite unprepared for any worse announcement; and my heart turns cold now, as I think of the sickening dizziness that came over me when I had opened the letter and read its contents. My husband stated, in effect, that his father was dead, and that he, himself, was compelled to start for Australia to look after some property there. He wrote in deep grief, he said, to confess that he was informed our Scottish marriage was irregular; and he was sorry to add that his present position was not such as would allow him to maintain a wife. In consequence, he advised me to return to my parents. They would forgive me; and if I kept silent as to what had happened, our family friends would doubtless not hear of it, and there would be nothing to prevent my marrying again. But in case I preferred to set up independently, he enclosed me three hundred pounds in bank-notes; and his last recommendation was that I should try to forget him. He loved me with all his heart, he vowed, and in giving me back my liberty—which he thought the wisest course to take *in my own interest*—he could only say, that it would have been his greatest happiness to keep me as his wife, if he could have afforded it. That was how my husband parted from me—who would have died for his sake:”

Here was a break at this part of the narrative. It was evident the writer had been overpowered by her recollections, and had thrown down her pen for an interval. The remainder of the letter was in a more unsteady handwriting

“I need not dwell on the consternation and despairing sorrow that fell on me. I was seized with brain fever, and for many days lay in bed delirious. The Frenchman, Dubois, availed himself of my helplessness to steal all my husband’s letters and every scrap of paper that could have remained in my hands for a testimony. I am sure he must have hunted for my marriage certificate too; but, actuated by a presentiment, I had hidden it under a carpet when I felt the fever coming on me. Upon recovering my senses, I found myself alone with the landlady, who had nursed me. Dubois was gone, taking my husband’s luggage with him, and I have never seen him since. As for the landlady, she was a depraved old woman, who, when I had told her my history, laughed in my face, and said my case was only that of all other girls who eloped from home. She advised me to do as others did—become an actress or something worse, and made me abominable proposals in the most collected manner, as if it were part of her trade. Ah! it is no fault of your brother’s if I did not sink in my misery to the degradation which

was pointed out to me as my only refuge. He it is, I am sure, who advised my husband to desert me; and all the woe that has fallen upon Miss Graham must lie at his door—not at mine.

“That is all I have to say. You will be able to substantiate many of my statements if you institute inquiries, and I hope you will, for as a clergyman and a gentleman, it ought to be your wish to see justice done me.

“MARGARET FORESTER.”

When Michael Christy had come to the end of the letter, the feeling uppermost in his mind was one of anger against his brother, who had hoped to outwit him. This he attributed to the nefarious influence of Colonel Forester, and a deep, holy resentment sprang up within him against the author of so much villany. Margaret might forge excuses for her husband, but Michael regarded him as the sole culprit, and Frank as his mere tool.

The obvious thing to do now was to test Margaret's veracity by investigation; and Michael proceeded to act without delay upon a resolution he had formed. There are no hunters so keen as those who stalk after truth.

He wrote to a Private Inquiry Office, whose London address he found in the papers, and requested that a confidential agent might be sent down to him on a business which might occupy two or three weeks and require exclusive attention, as well as much travelling. At the same time he drafted a telegram for his brokers to sell out £500 of stock, and lodge the sum at his banker's.

When the letter and draft had been carried off to Tolminster by one of the warders, Michael went to apprise Margaret of what he had done, and expressed the hope that in a very little time he should have evidence enough to confute her enemies. She thanked him for his promptitude, and asked whether he intended to see Colonel Forester. Michael answered that he would seek an interview with the colonel when he had got the report of the Inquiry Office, but thought it would be useless to do so before; to which Margaret agreed. The prospect of being at length righted sent some animation to her looks, and when she fixed her large eyes upon the chaplain, there was a more benignant expression in them than he had ever seen before.

He put her a few questions about Robert Dubois, and about the governess with whom she had stayed at Woolwich. This lady was dead, Margaret said with a sigh, and she had not seen her since the day of her elopement. Then Michael came to the period of those years when Margaret had been working as a milliner in London

before her second meeting with Forester. He had read in the report of the prisoner's examination before the Tolminster magistrates that she had been employed by a Miss Mudge, of Oxford Street, who gave good evidence as to her character.

"Do you think Miss Mudge could help us?" he inquired.

Margaret struggled a moment to be serious, and then smiled with an arch amusement which became her well.

"Miss Mudge is an excellent creature, but she dislikes being questioned. She implored me not to call her as a witness, because, said she, she had twice appeared in law suits against her will, and had been almost harried to death by counsel. It was the prosecution who called her, not I."

"But she spoke very highly of you," remarked Michael, smiling too, that his gravity might not make the light fade from the prisoner's face.

"We were very good friends," said Margaret. "I was her forewoman, because I could speak French to her customers, and draw costumes for her. I lived under her roof, and she paid me well. I think she owes me a little money now, but perhaps she has kept it on account of the expenses she incurred by coming down here. She is very welcome to it."

"Do you think she would employ you again if you were free?"

"No, I think not," replied Margaret. "Miss Mudge is a lady who sets great store by the opinion of society. I cannot describe her—you must see her for yourself. But do not tell her, please, that I wish her to render me any service, or she would be alarmed."

Again Margaret smiled, and Michael concluded that Miss Mudge was a "character." The interview ended here.

Mrs. Baillie, who let the chaplain out of the wing, was a little pale, and did not offer any of her usual brisk remarks. The serenity on Michael's features must have puzzled her—though it was serenity of a very fleeting sort, and died out the moment he stepped into the male wards, where those eternal crank-wheels were purring, and where prisoners were prowling about masked, polishing brasses, and making steel balusters shine till one was afraid to touch them.

The next day, towards noon, Michael received the visit of the private inquiry agent. A warder brought him in a card inscribed: "*Mr. Nathaniel Riddel—Late of Scotland Yard.*"

Mr. Riddel was a well-dressed man, of boney build and fine stature, just on the right side of middle age. He sported a black moustache and mutton-chop whiskers, interspersed with a few grey hairs; an erect bearing, an obsequious manner, and shifty eyes. He always cleared his throat before answering, and looked as if he

required things to be told him twice over, which he didn't. Words that entered his ear were at once circulated through his brain, and came out by and by in the form of pithy remarks—like the sheets of white paper which put into a steam press come out printed journals. Michael set the man down as a dullish fellow, and was not altogether mistaken, judging him by high intellectual standards; but he was a first-rate specimen of a class who are generally more suspicious than imaginative, and more sly than sharp.

Michael bade him be seated, and having examined the credentials he brought from his employers, Gehazi and Co., of the Strand, made him acquainted in a few words with his suspicions about Colonel Forester, and told him what must be done. Here was a photograph of Captain Christy, and he must contrive to procure himself one of Forester. Having done this he must go to the Randolph Hotel, Edinburgh, and ascertain whether a Captain Field and a Mr. Moore, accompanied by a lady and a French servant, had resided there for three weeks in the autumn of 1867. After that he would have to look through the directory of Edinburgh county, take note of all the "Albany Hotels," and visit them every one to make the same inquiries as at the "Randolph." Finally, he must proceed to the hotels inscribed on this list (Michael handed him one), and search the books for entries of the passage of "Captain and Mrs. Field," with the same servant, Robert Dubois.

As to this Frenchman, Michael instructed the detective to be minutely particular in noting any peculiarities he might learn which could lead to Dubois's identification; and for this purpose he would have, on returning to London, to institute inquiries also at 200, E—— Street. It seemed that Dubois spoke English with a strong French accent, and was a stout, jovial, talkative fellow, who carried a concertina about in his trunk, and was very fond of showing off his prowess on it before servant-girls. It was not likely that such a man could have passed through thirty hotels without leaving recollections. This was evidently the opinion of the detective, who had not spoken till then, but now nodded.

"Foreigners always leave some track, sir," he said, inserting the photograph of Frank in his pocket-book.

Michael had taken up a number of the *Eastshire Chronicle*, which contained the report of Margaret's examination before the magistrates.

"There is another point, Mr. Riddel," said he, calling the detective's attention to part of a column. "The case against Mrs. Field's story is much strengthened by the evidence of Colonel Forester's valet, Edward Jasper, who deposed that he had been nine years in his master's service, and during that period had never

been absent from him *more than a week at a time*. Questioned as to whether he had been away during any portion of the term between August and the end of October, 1867, he answers that he and his master were abroad at that time, having gone first to the Paris Exhibition, after that to Vichy, Baden, and ultimately to Hombourg. Now if Colonel Forester and Captain Field are one and the same person, Edward Jasper committed perjury. Why did he do so? Where was he in the autumn of 1867? What are the man's antecedents? These are questions we shall have to fathom."

"I perceive it stated that Jasper was a private in the 4th Battalion of Grenadier Guards, and that Colonel Forester bought him his discharge when he himself passed into the staff," remarked Nat Riddel, eyeing the paper. "The 4th are lying at Windsor now, sir, and there is a friend of mine, who is an officer's servant, in it. I shall be able to get some information from him. I think I had better begin that way before going north."

"As you please, only speed your movements," said Michael, laying down the *Chronicle*. "Perhaps you will be able to procure a photograph of Colonel Forester at Windsor; if not you may contrive to circumvent Jasper himself: he must be staying now with his master, who is at Fairdale Manor."

"You don't happen to have a photograph of the lady—of Mrs. Field, sir?" asked the detective, after clearing his throat as usual. "It would be very convenient."

"No, but I can easily have one taken and forwarded to you," replied Michael, who drew out his watch. "And now, when will you be prepared to start?"

"At once, sir; I have brought a carpet-bag with me."

"That will do very well. Mind, as fast as you obtain information you must send it me by letter, and whenever you mean to stay more than twenty-four hours in one place despatch me a telegram, so that I may be able to correspond with you." Saying which, Michael glanced at the detective to see if he understood, and was answered by an affirmative inclination.

There remained the defrayal of expenses. The chaplain handed Nat Riddel five ten-pound notes, took his receipt for them, and told him to telegraph for further remittances as he might want them. The sum of his instructions was, that he must make what haste he could, and spare no expense for arriving at the truth. The detective liked this gentlemanly way of doing business, and almost brightened. He promised that Mr. Christy should be satisfied with him, and Michael conducted him to the door. From first to last the man had expressed no surprise at finding a person of Colonel

Forester's rank mixed up in a black fraud. Nothing surprised him.

During this short, pregnant interview, Michael had been buoyed up by a factitious excitement; but as soon as the detective was gone, the reaction set in under the form of an hour's miserable depression. He had crossed the Rubicon now and carried the war into his brother's country. There was no retreating from his position as Margaret's defender; and all he could hope for was, that when the certainty of Frank's guilt was brought him, he should be able to make such terms with Margaret as would save his brother from blasting disgrace.

CHAPTER XVII.

"ROUGE ET NOIR."

FRANK CHRISTY was, as we have mentioned, the most popular man in the 12th Dragoons; and this was saying a great deal in a corps where all the officers were good fellows, except "Buttery James," whom nobody much liked. There were no sets in the regiment, and no bickerings, for none of the officers were married. They almost had a common purse from their readiness to oblige each other. They made common cause against duns, bores, and match-making mothers. If one of them got into an entanglement, the united wits of all the others, from Colonel Buckman down to young Dadds, the last-joined sub, were employed to pull him out. Reticence as to pecuniary embarrassments or flirtations was but little practised among them, and they communicated even family affairs to one another with brotherly straightforwardness. Thus it had long been known in the mess that Frank Christy had a pretty cousin who was an heiress; and when Lieutenant Richard Bool took leave to fall in love with Miss Nelly, that fact also became promptly known through the culprit's own avowals.

Lord Harry Gayleard disinterred a copy of verses which Dick had placed for safe custody in a tobacco-jar, and read them aloud in the smoking-room just before dinner amid shouts of laughter. Three officers held Dick down in a chair during the infliction, so that he might not snatch the paper from the reader's hands; and a fourth, armed with a plug of tobacco, threatened to stuff it into

his mouth if he ventured to swear or speak. To do the 12th justice, they were admirers of true genius; and it was unanimously voted by them that not one of their number, except Dick, could have composed such verses as these :

Let poets praise their Carolines,
Ann Pages, Thrales, or Stellæ ;
One name in Richard's memory shines,
And that's the name of Nelly.

Let painters boast Killarney Lake,
Or vale of Abergele ;*
One view alone I care to take,
And that's a sight of Nelly.

Let minstrels sing their chanticleers,
Their Patti, or Trebelli ;
One voice makes music in my ears—
The gentle voice of Nelly.

Oh, I could face a thousand foes,
From tattoo to *reveille*,
Might I but win a scarf or rose
From those fair hands of Nelly.

Our earth had ne'er its critics seen,
Nor Porson, nor Orelli,
If all the world had faultless been,
Like my own precious Nelly.

Place me where, like a burning coal,
The sun beats down on Delhi,
It falls like dew upon my soul,
The gladsome thought of Nelly.

Or place me where my frigid sails
The Arctic breezes belly ;
One name shall thaw those frozen gales,
That name is thine, dear Nelly.

Poor Dick had to submit to be chaffed about these verses all through dinner and dessert. In the billiard-room, after coffee, he capitulated, and asked what of it if he was in love? The question was referred to Frank, as the nearest of kin to the lady, and he told Dick to be hanged. Colonel Buckman sat down to a hand at whist with Bool for his partner, Frank and Gayleard for adversaries; and he laughed till his plump sides shook, for he took as humorous views of matrimony as a monkish abbot in the old times. No petticoats should come and disturb the harmony of his regiment

* Pronounced "Abergelly."

—that he vowed. "Dick, you dog, mind your cards, or I'll disown you," said he. "Frank, I trump your Queen of Hearts. Hullo, sir, you've revoked; we claim our three tricks." Whist was not played for ginger-bread nuts in the 12th, and Frank dropped his twenty guineas on the table before the evening was over. He was so out of sorts that he went in freely for trumping his partner's aces, making Gayleard sing out as if he were having teeth drawn.

When bed-time came, and all had retired to their chambers, Dick Bool slunk down from an upper story in dressing-gown and slippers, and thrust his head through Frank's door. "I say, old man, let me explain what my intentions are," said he. "Go to the deuce," bawled Frank, who was already between sheets. "Well, but I am quite in earnest, 'pon my oath . . ." "Will you hook it," was the answer, and, backing the injunction with the only missile at his disposal, Frank sent his pillow whistling towards the door at his comrade's head. Dick was in despair that his protestations should not be taken more seriously. He had not the least idea that Frank himself had thoughts of proposing to Nelly, and imagined that his sentiments were only scouted from a doubt as to there being genuine "gold-spoon," to use the regimental slang. The 12th recognized two sorts of love—"pewter-spoon," the attention paid to barmaids and such light baggage; and "silver-spoon," the dangling after married women; but as to "gold-spoon," or true 18-carat love, much scepticism existed, and the name of it could not so much as be breathed without raising vehement protests, along with such sallies as "Hold him! His head's off."

Intent upon proving the sincerity of his affection towards Nelly, Dick spent the dark hours in writing to Frank, addressed the envelope in a feigned hand, and ordered Spuds to take it in to his master along with his other letters in the morning. He rose betimes for this purpose. At breakfast Frank made no allusion to the missive, but rising from the table, he twisted the note into a spill, and lit a cigarette with it before Dick's eyes, winking as he did so. Hereat little Bool was wroth. He had all the valour of a bantam, and seeing that Frank would not hear him, he resolved to take such a revenge as would keep him indoors all day and force him to listen. There was an officer who dabbled in chemicals, and had his cupboard full of acids and salts. Dick posted up to his room, borrowed a little sulphate of iron and some powder of galls, then betook himself to Frank's chamber, where he dropped the first-named ingredient into the water-jug, and smeared the galls (which are white) over the clean towels on the horse. Frank was on duty at stable inspection, which is inodorous work, and when he came in towards noon his

first care was to wash his face and hands. These parts of his person, under the friction of the towel, instantly turned to blueish black, so that he looked duskier than the corked ensign in Charles Lever's story—dusky as a christy-minstrel, or a true plantation negro. His mess-mates, apprised of the fun by Dick, after promise of secrecy, crowded on the landing and raised shrieks of merriment. His own servant, Spuds, sat down on the staircase, hugging a pair of top-boots, and laughed till he cried; and, to make matters worse, while this tumult was at its height Sir Wemyss Christy and Nelly drove up to the barracks. They had come into Tolminster to visit Michael, and stopped to pick up Frank on their way to the gaol.

Dicky Bool, who sighted them from the staircase window, ran downstairs to do the honours of the officers' quarters, and explained what was up, though without avowing his own share in the pleasantry. Nelly, who adored fun, asked to see Frank with his face black, and the traitor Bool conducted her and her father to the top of the staircase, where they got a view of Frank standing opposite his cheval glass and rubbing his face to desperation. The more he rubbed the blacker his face became, and when he turned round at the sound of Nelly's voice, he exhibited a countenance furbished like a coal-grate. This was too much for Nelly, who hid her face in her muff and joined her mirth to that of the dragoons. She only remained a moment on the landing, but the glance she exchanged with Dick Bool before going downstairs was enough to set Frank suspecting who was the offender.

He could take as good as he gave at joking, and never lost his temper at anything that was meant for a lark. His way was to pay back tricks in kind. Darting suddenly from his room, he chevied Dick downstairs as a mastiff might a weasel. The alert Bool cleared six steps at a bound, made for a passage, and would have got into the open air, but opening a wrong door he rushed into a cupboard, and here Frank ran him down, caught him in his arms, and bore him struggling upstairs. Straight into Gayleard's room he rushed with his load, followed by the uproarious throng of gay messmates, and planting Dick inside his lordship's shower-bath, swore to pull the string if he did not immediately disclose the substance that would take the black off. Dick did not wish to be showered upon. Nelly was still below and might, with the prejudices of her sex, think him uninteresting if he were reduced to the condition of a dripping sop; unfortunately, he could not remember anything that would counteract sulphate of iron and galls. "Lemon-juice," he faltered at all hazards, as Frank's strong hand held him motionless by the nape of the neck. "Will you swear it's lemon, you little

beggar? if not I'll soak you," shouted Frank. "Soda too—lemon and soda," yelled Bool, and this time with so much conviction that Frank let him go. Dick jumped out of the bath and shook himself, but when he had put half the staircase betwixt him and his foe, he sang out in a voice which was brazen for so small a man—"I say, Frank, I forgot to tell you that soda will take off the skin along with the black. The best thing you can do is to let it alone. It'll come off of itself by the day after to-morrow. I'll do your duty meantime," and with this Parthian shot he vanished.

The upshot of this was that Frank did not go to the prison with Nelly and her father. Dicky Bool went instead, was introduced to Michael, lunched with him, and spent an agreeable afternoon viewing all the sights of the gaol. Frank sat in his room playing *écarté* with Gayleard, who took compassion on his loneliness and won a ten-pound note of him. He was in a humour for knocking Bool's head off, but that warrior took care not to cross his path. Dick accepted an invitation to go and dine with the Armstrongs at Gorsemoor, and on returning to Tolminster slept at the "Crown" instead of going back to his rooms. The next morning he made arrangements to get his duty and Frank's done, ordered his hunting things to be brought him to the hotel, and rode off gaily to a meet at Cherry Hill, at which Nelly was to be present. Frank had made arrangements to attend this meet, but his face was still too inky to admit of his exhibiting himself in public, and he was reduced to another day's gambling; this time with Buttery Jarnes. All the regiment, troopers, trumpeters, and all, knew of the practical joke that had been played upon the popular captain, and admired Lieutenant Bool's knowledge of chemicals. Frank himself took some time to understand how he could have been so neatly dyed with water which was perfectly clear, and towels which looked clean. His face, ears, neck, and hands had been stained as if he had dipped them in ink, and the colour only vanished from them as ink does after repeated washings in hot water, which caused him to pass through all the shades of blue.

Dicky Bool was too honourable an officer to have played such a trick if he had suspected that his friend had any designs upon Nelly; but thinking that Frank had flouted him in mere jest, he was proud to show that he had sported the "gold-spoon" in earnest, and he enjoyed Nelly's company without compunction. He rode after the hounds beside her through a couple of brisk runs, leading the way over the fences, and giving her the highest idea of his horsemanship. He was never out of breath, talked and laughed as he rode, and was capitally mounted. Nelly got the brush through

his gallantry. As they were ambling back to Gorsemoor, muddy, animated, and in excellent spirits, Dick talked of the ball which the 12th Dragoons meant shortly to give, and hinted plainly enough that it would be chiefly in her honour; then they fell to laughing over Frank's enforced seclusion, and Nelly made so merry about her cousin's black cheeks that Lieutenant Bool was a hundred miles from thinking that she felt the least inclination for Frank except in a sisterly way.

But Dick did not propose, and his attentions had a result distressing to Nelly, for they made Hugh Armstrong madly jealous. Hugh could not ride, dance, or chat like Dick. His only advantage over the dragoon was that he measured three inches more, and was, perhaps, heir to a larger property; but he had early made up his mind that the brown-eyed, blithe-tempered Lincolnshire girl would be just the wife for him, and his parents were consenting parties, deeming Miss Christy's person, family, and acres unexceptionable. So Dick's gallivanting only fanned Hugh's flame, and as Nelly was residing under his father's roof, he availed himself of a chance offered him on the evening of that hunting day to put his fate to the touch. He and Nelly used to play chess after dinner, while Sir Wemyss and Mr. Armstrong talked politics near the fire, with Mrs. Armstrong to abet them. An opening move of Nelly's knight was the signal for operations on the young squire's part, and he tendered his hand and heart in place of moving his king's pawn. This put Nelly in a very embarrassing position. She was fonder of Frank than she had ever owned aloud, and had long ago divined her father's secret wish that she should marry her cousin. If she felt a little inward pique at Frank's seeming indifference to her, it did not amount to resentment, nor exclude the hope that he would some day mend his manners. For Hugh Armstrong she felt nothing more than friendly esteem, and would have preferred Dick Bool if she had been forced to choose between the two. So she refused Hugh—kindly, and with an attempt at playfulness—(which was the only way to avoid a trying scene) but in such terms as left no room for a renewal of his offer.

The game was finished in rather awkward silence, and at the close of the evening Nelly spoke to her father alone in his room and acquainted him with what had happened. The baronet kissed her, and called her a good girl, but agreed that they must leave Gorsemoor. This would be a good opportunity for going to stay a fortnight with Michael, and helping him put his house to rights. A few apologetic words spoken to Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong privately in the morning settled matters as much as it was possible to settle

them, and the father and daughter drove off to Tolminster after breakfast in the Gorsemoor waggonette. Mrs. Armstrong was, of course, offended at the rebuff which her son had endured, but, being a queenly sort of person, was careful to conceal it. As for Hugh, he had the tact to seem as pleasant as usual, though his heart was filled with bitterness against Lieutenant Bool, whom he regarded as his successful rival. In his scorn he wondered much that so sensible a girl as Nelly could find anything to admire in such a jackanapes.

A similar wonder pre-occupied Frank as he stood at a window in the mess-room and watched the waggonette drive into the barrack square with his uncle and cousin inside it. Sir Wemyss sat with his arms folded, and sniffed the fresh air with relish; Nelly had her maid beside her, and looked very winsome in her sealskin jacket and *toque* ornamented with the blue iridescent wing of a kingfisher. The drive in the fine cold weather had lent a colour to her cheeks, but she was serious, for a girl is not quite herself for a day or two after she has refused an offer of marriage. She was reproaching herself with having perhaps given Hugh too much encouragement by her freedom of manner, and resolved to keep a watch over herself in respect of Dick Bool.

Frank's face was white again now, and he was dressed for a regimental court-martial to be held on a deserter. As the vehicle drew up on the gravel sweep he came out trailing his sword over the stone steps, and prepared for the banter which Nelly would level at him. He made sure she would inquire after Bool, but she did not. She simply shook hands, and left her father to explain that they had come on a visit to Michael.

"We expect you to join us at lunch," said the baronet. "Don't stint us of your company more than you can help; Nell will be wanting somebody to take her out shopping."

"I'll come up as soon as our court-martial is done—in about an hour," answered Frank. "Do you wish to see Dicky Bool, Nelly?"

"Why should I want to see Mr. Bool?" replied Nelly, turning scarlet.

"I'll call him if you do, but he is busy combing some red paint out of his hair at this moment."

"You have been playing him some trick then?"

"He played me a trick, and Nemesis was bound to overtake him," laughed Frank. "Bool's custom is to have a bucket of water poured over his head when he tubs of a morning. It seems that a gallon of red paint got into the bottom of this bucket over-night, but as there was a gallon of water on the top his servant did not

notice it, and dashed all the contents out together. When he saw his master bespattered with red he thought he had broken his head, and dropped the bucket on him with a scarified howl. Bool was still more frightened, for he imagined he was being murdered, and danced out of his bath like a Choctaw with his war-paint on; you never saw such a gaudy sight."

The idea of little Mr. Bool skipping about with a lot of red paint over him was irresistibly comic, and set Nelly's maid tittering. Nelly joined, blushing.

"You dragoons are sad dogs," ejaculated Sir Wemyss, amused too. "You want a little warring to make you steady. We'll drive on now. Don't be late for lunch, Frank."

"All right, sir," said the Captain. "Shall I carry Dick your condolences, Nelly?"

"As you please," replied Nelly, drily, and the carriage swept away.

She was displeased at being twitted, but Frank fancied she was sorry that Dick Bool had been painted red. He moralized over the eccentric passions of her sex as he wended his way to the court-room, and his thought was still haunting him an hour afterwards, when, after changing his clothes, he set off for the prison.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DRAGON'S WOOING.

THE larks were all afield on this crisp November morning, and the hedgerows sparkled with melting hoar-frost. The country-people on the roads had hale looks. Farmers were getting their dykes deepened for the approach of winter; women were hanging out their linen to dry; the cattle in the meadows were browsing on the short wet grass contentedly. Over the lea came snatches of wedding chimes from a distant village steeple, and troops of children, careering home from school, loitered in the roads to spin their tops, and crow over the last joke they had played their teachers. Merry weather, merry thoughts.

Frank, enlivened, asked himself whether he should surrender Nelly without a struggle, and he answered, No. Hap what might,

he would find out if there was anything serious betwixt her and Bool.

He and Nelly had never been quite as brother and sister, for there was eight years' difference between their ages, but she had been his pet when he was a boy, and had blossomed into womanhood without his noticing the change in her. He saw it now. She could not long remain unmarried, and he was loth to see her become the wife of another man. Where should he turn for a home if he lost her, and if Oakleigh Hall, where he had been bred, became the property of such a one as Bool? Oakleigh did not form part of the entailed estates, and would go to Nelly. If he wished to live in the old place, which he loved so well, he must make her his wife.

A sense of dangers encompassing him increased Frank's inclination to marry. He had spent two very unhappy days chewing the cud of reflection. He had not dared to write to Forester about his ill-success with Mrs. Baillie, and was growing more and more uneasy at the slip he had made in the matron's hearing. Michael's suspicions, too, were evidently unabated, and all this might end in sudden disgrace. Then the dragoon was tired of bachelor life. For some time past he had been pursuing dissipation rather as a pastime than as a pleasure, and it palled upon him. He had debts, entanglements, and loose habits, which he could shake off as a married man; and it was a fair prospect, that of quashing all his liabilities, and beginning life afresh as a country gentleman, with a wife who could trust him. Nelly! Nelly! Her pretty image brought recollections which made her cousin ponder that he must not let such a prize slip from his hands, and that he had best secure it quickly. If trouble came upon him before he was engaged to her it might alienate them; but he knew that if once Nelly had plighted him her troth she would remain true to him in spite of anything that might befall—ay, sustain him, forgive him, and believe in him to his life's end, though all the rest of the world might doubt.

He had better make haste then; but herein did Fate so humorously play with this soldier, that he, who had never been put to shame by bonnet or snood, was at a loss how he should ask a little country-bred cousin to become his wife! He thought himself clever for devising a plan of tactics that would put Bool gradually to rout, and enable him, Frank, to make his proposal somewhere about Christmas.

The county gaol looked as sinister on a fine day as on a foul. Fogs and rains wrapped it in gloom; sunlight threw a cold glare on

its grey walls, and accentuated the dungeon-aspect of its grated windows. Frank had not yet entered the chaplain's private residence, and judged it a hole of a place. The door was opened for him by a squinting Irishwoman of fifty, with coal-smudges on her face, and he was shown into the departed Mr. Jabbot's frowzy library. Nelly was alone there, perched on a chair, and making a portrait of Jeremy Taylor hang straight. She had taken off her jacket and hat, and had been doing wonders with a hammer and some tacks in righting things which Mr. Jabbot's family had been content to see crooked. The dust which the picture-frame shook into her eyes made her blink. She turned as Frank entered, but did not get off the chair. Her violet dress was looped up over a scarlet under-skirt; she held her small hammer in one hand, and a handful of tacks in the other, and eyed her cousin coolly.

"Well, your court-martial is over?"

"Yes, dear. Where's uncle?"

"With Michael, inspecting the prison kitchens."

Nelly was struck by Frank's addressing her as "dear," which was an unusual style with him.

"Frank," she said, suddenly, "you must please not chaff me about Mr. Bool any more. It's not proper."

"All right, Nell," he answered, seeing she was serious.

"It would make people who heard you fancy all sorts of things," she went on, blushing. "Oh, those tacks!"

She had dropped some on the carpet. Frank stooped to pick them up, and she availed herself of the occasion to rest a hand on his shoulder and jump to the floor.

"You should have seen Dick all daubed with scarlet, though," said Frank, with a laugh, as he rose.

"Not a word more on that subject," repeated Nelly, with a frown. "No, indeed; I shall be very angry with you if you don't listen to what I say."

"I don't want to make you angry, Nell."

"Well, then, get on that chair and do for Bishop Jewel what I did for the other picture—dust the top, and pull the cord straight. Will you come to-morrow, and help me put Michael's books on the shelves?"

"To-morrow I can't, I'm sorry to say. Porkins is seedy, and Boker, our adjutant, has just told me I must do his guard. I'll come the day after, though."

"Oh, I can manage without you. I don't believe a bit in Mr. Porkins's illness, you know. I am persuaded you are simply going up to London to enjoy yourself in some way of your own."

"Well, that's complimentary. 'Pon my word, I looked into Perkins's room, and the poor beggar's face is all wrapped up in flannels."

"That wouldn't spoil his appearance on guard. A man doing his duty is always a pleasing sight, even with flannels round his face," said Nelly.

"I don't think I should have been a pleasing sight marching about with my face black," observed Frank, setting Bishop Jewel to rights. "However, if you doubt my word, Nell, I won't do my guard."

"Oh, oh! and get punished?"

"I don't care! There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you. I'd cut the service."

"Better and better! Pray, how would you kill time when you had no more sword matters to occupy you?"

"I would go and live in Lincolnshire, at Heydon Hall," answered Frank; "I was just thinking of it as I came along. Do you remember Heydon Hall—the old deserted house that was always to let?"

"It's to be let now," said Nelly, pensively.

"With its weed-grown yard, and empty stables, and the broken sun-dial."

"And the old garden where we used to go poaching when you came from school," took up Nell. "Do you recollect, Frank, how you climbed the fruit trees, and used to throw me down the ripest plums?"

"And that white pony of yours whom we used to turn loose to graze, and who sometimes wouldn't let himself be caught. I think I see him now the day when I seized him by the bridle and he dragged me through a gooseberry-bush, making you cry because you thought my hair was full of thorns."

"But it *was* full of thorns. You were so scratched that I had to run to the horse-trough to fetch you some water."

"Which you brought me in your straw hat, eh? and you bathed my face with your handkerchief, while that brute of a pony stood by and laughed at us, with his mouth full of cowslips."

"Oh, and we laughed at him too; for we laughed at everything then. Eh, those were happy times!" exclaimed Nell, with a little sigh.

"And why shouldn't they come back, dear?" asked Frank.

Imperceptibly they had glided together into the embrasure of a window, and stood so close together that their hands touched, and were interlaced without any effort of volition on their parts.

Frank discovered that wooing is not so difficult when the listener is not too coy, and the speaker finds memories hurrying up to spur his pleading words. When Nelly perceived on what tack the dialogue was veering, she did make a girlish attempt to escape, but the rapidity of the attack took her defenceless. Her cousin's hand imprisoned hers, and his arm was round her waist when he breathed his next utterance.

"Why shouldn't we return to the old haunts together, Nelly? We can take many a summer ramble side by side, and when we are tired stroll back to our home at Oakleigh, as we used to do in bygone times."

"Times so long ago, Frank!" she muttered, making no very strong endeavour to disengage herself.

"But times which we might call back with a double delight in them if we resolved to make them last. Don't you recollect how as a boy I loved every stone and tree at Oakleigh, and felt proud to live there? When Michael and I were left orphans your father made it our home, and you became our little sister. You cannot be my sister now, Nelly; but if you will, Oakleigh can still become my home, and you, your father, and I can live there together never to separate."

"Frank, Frank," she faltered, "you are not making fun of me?"

"I am asking you to decide my life for me, darling," he murmured, drawing her head gently on to his shoulder. "I want you to become my little guardian-angel, and to say 'yes' to my entreaties; so that I may lead you to pluck the flowers for your wedding bouquet out of the old hedgerows, where we walked hand in hand as children. Say, will you?"

"I am afraid it's a dream, Frank," she whispered, looking with tearful smiles into his face, "and that when I awake I shall find it's not true."

Thus it came to pass that this so suddenly betrothed pair were soon seated very near each other on the sofa, and that Frank was drying Nelly's eyes. He could not manage it all at once, though it was not a handkerchief he used, for the tears would flow, albeit smiles gleamed through them, like sunshine through the rain in May. It was all so unexpected, and Nelly, who had long secretly hoped and despaired of winning her soldier cousin, required time to realize her joy, while Frank himself, who had accomplished in half an hour what he had thought it would need weeks to perform, wondered that he had not proposed long ago, since it was so pleasant to hold his pretty cousin's hands and see her laugh and cry, whilst

he poured into her ears all the tender nonsense which comes to the lips of lovers. They had been pledged to each other for an hour, but it seemed five minutes, when Sir Wemyss and Michael returned. Then Frank rose, reddening, but bright enough to say, "Uncle, I have been making Nelly cry. I have asked if I may buy her a wedding-ring?"

"Aha! eh, what?" exclaimed the baronet, his features turning crimson. He was too much moved to say more. Nelly ran into his arms, and Frank held out his hand to Michael, who shook it cordially. For the moment every resentful feeling of the chaplain's was swallowed up in joy that his brother's days of wildness would now cease. The influence of a sweet, brave-hearted girl could not but operate on him for good. His love would purify him, and doubtless, under God, impel him to speak the truth about the unfortunate prisoner, who, like himself, had loved, but been less fortunate in her choice. All these thoughts crowded upon Michael Christy in a moment.

Presently Sir Wemyss exclaimed, drying his eyes, "Aha, the sly puss! that's why she refused Hugh Armstrong yesterday. She had her own plans all the while."

"Hugh Armstrong?" echoed Frank.

"O, papa, you shouldn't!" ejaculated Nelly, and hid her confusion by letting her betrothed embrace her again.

"Why not, Missy? There's no harm in letting the cat out of the bag now," laughed Sir Wemyss. "Yes, Frank; and it is not the first offer, either, that she has refused for your sake. She knew that her old father had set his heart on seeing the pair of you smiling behind a wedding-cake. Give me your hand, boy, and God bless you."

"And you, Mike, brighten up and kiss your sister," said Frank.

"You don't need compliments from me, Nelly dear," said Michael, drawing her to him, and kissing her on both cheeks; "you know what I think of you, and you have made me happier than I can tell."

"And do you think you have not made me happy too, both of you?" was Nelly's glad answer.

The squinting Irishwoman came in to say luncheon was ready, and they all adjourned to the parlour. After the meal they spent a happy afternoon round the fire, as unmindful of being in a prison as crickets on a hearth. Sir Wemyss cared not how often he repeated that he had made up his mind about joining his nephew and daughter ever since Nell was born; and now that the propitious event was consummated, he would not "die content,"—

as most fathers say in such cases—but, please Heaven, live his hundred years to dandle his grand-children, and their children after them. It was all moonshine, said this worthy gentleman, to talk of mere years wearing out a sexagenarian; it was excesses or grief that aged a body. Give people food convenient for them, plenty of fresh air and exercise, clean dwellings, and cheerful subjects to think upon, and they would die as full of years as the patriarchs. He had some thoughts of founding a hospital for the obese, for fat was another of those things that weigh down longevity. Fat people were men committing slow suicide, and if he could have his will every person weighing more than twelve stone seven pounds should be sent to thin in a hospital. Having said which, Sir Wemyss opened a window and took seven full and deep breathings, to lay in his hourly stock of oxygen.

But if this day was to be marked with so white a stone by Frank Christy, with what colour in pebbles was it to be noted by disappointed Dicky Bool?

Washed of his paint, fresh as a shrimp, but very much in love, Dick sat alone in his room with the Muse of Lyrical Poetry invisible at his elbow. He wrote verses in Nelly's honour, thus whiling away the hours until he could meet her again, or talk about her with some sympathetic comrade, or dream about her in bed. His verses were not meant for Nelly's eyes, but as the outpourings of his new-born power as a poet, they served to paint the moral transformation that had come over him since the arrow had pierced his bosom.

THE Tally-hos of Richard Bool
 Shall rouse no more the Pytchley spinneys;
 No more shall pyramids and pool
 With whist and loo dispute his guineas.

A gallant's life no more I'll lead,
 Too lightly wasting love's caresses;
 My wanton tongue no more shall plead
 With raven locks and gold-dyed tresses.

The punch-bowl's flame, the midnight rout,
 No more shall tempt me, lorn and lonely;
 My royst'ring songs I'll cease to shout—
 I'll be a *Christy*-minstrel only!

Of old my aims were light as froth:
 I nailed blue-rocks, or potted red does;
 I filled the pockets on green cloth,
 Or emptied them on greener meadows.

At home my every thought was "lark,"
A plough was all I earned at Harrow;
In camp, the piquet after dark
Once found me on a coster's barrow.

But now I'll strive for nobler fame,
And emulate some laurelled hero;
If thou for me wilt change thy name,
I'll be no more—I swear—a Zero!

Be mine, my love! be all my own;
Send answer "yes" when comes the mail in;
And I and mine are thine alone,
With all I try, succeed, or fail in!

Frank Christy stole quietly into the room as Dick was nibbling his penholder for another stanza.

"Wish me joy, Dick," he said gaily; "I'm going to be married."

"Hullo, it's you!" exclaimed little Bool, springing up with alacrity and fortifying himself behind a chair. "You've not brought in a paint-pot with you?"

"No, and you've not got any blacking, I hope? Show your paws."

"Clean on both sides," laughed Dick, "so we can shake hands. Well, who's your victim?"

"My cousin Nell. I'm very sorry for you, old man, but it has been a case of 'gold-spoon' between us for years."

"What?" gasped Dick Bool, turning pale.

"Gold-spoon, Dick—big as a ladle, 18-carat and all."

"And you never told me? Well, if you mean this for a joke I call it a bad one," said Dicky Bool.

"But I don't mean it for a joke, man," laughed Frank, and enjoying his friend's discomfiture.

"Never mind," declared Bool, red and indignant; "I call it the worst joke I have ever heard—the very worst!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE TRACK.

WE must now follow the movements of the detective, Riddel. On leaving the gaol he hastened to the railway station, and was lucky enough to find a train just starting town-wards. He took a ticket to Windsor, and by changing trains at the first junction was enabled to reach the royal borough by four. Windsor was known to him, for he had often been on duty at the Castle when he was a plain-clothes officer of Scotland Yard. He had paced for hours between the Round Tower and St. George's Chapel during the visits of foreign sovereigns, keeping watch for those suspicious strangers who want to see Royalty too close.

Threading the alley which leads from the Great Western Terminus into Peascod Street, he passed Bachelor's Acre, and made for the Foot Guards' Barracks in Sheep Street. His object was to see one Thomas Buckster, an officer's servant, and to pump from him all he knew about Colonel Forester's valet, Edward Jasper. The bugler on guard at the barrack gate told him where Buckster was to be found, and one of the grenadiers obligingly went to halloo him out of the canteen. Buckster slouched into the yard dressed in civilian clothes, and smoking a meerschaum. As a preliminary to all business, he and Riddel adjourned to a neighbouring public-house, where rum-punch was ordered and brought into the little sanded parlour behind the bar.

Tom Buckster knew Nat Riddel to be a detective, for he had become acquainted with him while the latter was collecting evidence for a divorce suit, in which one of his—Buckster's—former masters was implicated. On that occasion the grenadier had twiddled the policeman round his little finger, and hoaxed him. He was a tall, fine soldier, who had fought at Inkermann, and had nearly twenty-one years' service at his back; but fifteen years of his time had been spent in regimental valeting, and he had acquired all the defects which come of over-pay and over-feeding. He was at present servant to a duke's younger son, who squandered money without counting; and he had saved so much, that on getting his discharge and pension he meant to set up a roadside tavern, and go in for the patronage of the Coaching Club. Meanwhile, he wore his master's clothes, cut by Poole, and cast off while the gloss was still on them, and drank more claret than small beer.

"What's up now, Nat?" he asked, lighting one of the cigars which the detective had ordered along with the punch.

"I want you to tell me about Edward Jasper, who was in your battalion, and servant to Colonel Forester," said Riddel.

"Scotch Ned! I remember him. What's he been up to?"

"Oh, nothing; he's heir to a legacy, and proof is sought as to his identity."

"Get along yer!" laughed Buckster. "What will you give me for my answers?"

"Here's two pounds," said Nat Riddel, producing the coins. "Now tell us all you know, and act fair, Tom."

"It aint much I know," replied the servant, after he had pocketed the money. "Ned Jasper served in the 42nd Highlanders, and came to our regiment in 1860. He had a brother in the battalion who 'claimed' him, as we call it. If a chap serving in one corps has a brother in another they let 'em come together, and we call that 'claiming.' Ned had served in India during the Mutiny, and got a good-conduct medal. He soon became Captain Forester's servant, and his master liked him; but we didn't, owing to his being a shy cove and short of temper. He seemed to have some trouble on his mind, and now and then, after he had drunk a glass or two, he used to say that he'd give a hundred pounds to wipe out something that had happened to him in bygone times."

"Do you know what that something was?" asked the detective, who had been taking notes.

"No, I don't!" said Buckster.

"Is that all you can tell me about Jasper, then?"

"I think it is, pretty nearly," replied the grenadier, as if conscious that he had given a short two pounds' worth. "You say you want Ned's photograph though. I've got one in my room, and will give it you if you come along."

They finished the punch, and Buckster pocketed the cigars that remained in the saucer. Dusk was coming on, and the two sallied out to one of the small by-streets near the barracks, where Buckster had a room in the house of a mechanic. Officers' servants are required to sleep in barracks, but they usually hire a garret in town to store their personalities, and also their wives, if they happen to be married "without indulgence"—that is, without leave from the Colonel empowering the wives to claim married men's quarters within barracks. Tom Buckster was not married, and the expense of the room which he rented was shared by a couple of other bachelor servants, who used it as he did, for a store-house. It was full of those things which extravagant young gentlemen throw away as

rubbish, and which their servants pick up to sell. Buckster struck a match, and by the light of a candle revealed a row of old boots and slippers, a dozen hats of all shapes, heaps of sporting papers, old novels, cigar-boxes, bottles of wine filched from the mess-room, empty pots of perfumery and pomatum. There were a number of lava ornaments, souvenirs of a tour in Italy; an alpenstock on which were burned the names of Swiss mountains never climbed; a yellow jockey's jacket, worn by Buckster's master in a steeple-chase; several flannel caps, some fishing-tackle, a couple of bats, two pairs of old boxing-gloves, and an expensive musical box whose spring was broken. Buckster set the candle on the table, and drew out from a corner a battered leather portmanteau, plastered all over with continental labels. Unlocking it, he produced a folio album, containing four cartes in a page, and nearly filled with portraits of officers, soldiers, and ladies of the *demi monde*.

There were two photographs of Edward Jasper, the one showing him in the picturesque Highland uniform, the other in plain clothes. Nat Riddel withdrew them both, promising to return them in a month. Then Buckster turned the page and pointed to the vignette of Colonel Forester in a shooting-coat and deerstalking hat. When the detective had considered it attentively he laid his finger on another one lower down, which represented an officer in the undress braided frock-coat and sash of the Guards.

"That's Forester too, aint it?" said he, "though he looks a bit older here."

"No, that's our hadjutant that used to be—a poor devil sprung from the ranks," answered Buckster, with the contempt of all British soldiers for officers who are not "gentlemen." "In the Guards, you know, they can't get gentlemen to take hadjutant's duty, so they promote a sergeant-major who's a married man and don't dine at mess, which he couldn't afford. This chap was a bit like Forester, owing to their both being dark, and wearing their face hair similar; but Lor' bless you, you'd never a' mistook 'em if you'd a' seen 'em side by side. Dobson was this one's name, and he's retired now."

"I'd like to borrow them two photographs," said the detective, after a moment's pause.

"All right. They'll cost you a sov' apiece, my boy," said Buckster, coolly.

"That's too much," replied Nat Riddel, who, so saying, tried gently to slip one of the cartes out of its frame to look at the artist's name on the back; but the guardsman noticed the move, and laid his hands over the album.

"You're up to some game, Nat," said he with a wink. "Come, will you give me a ten-pun' note if I make it worth your while?"

"Can't afford it," asserted the detective. "I'll give you two pounds if you'll let me have the photographs and tell me the trouble that was on Edward Jasper's mind."

"What'll it lead me to if I do? Shall I be called up as a witness in court? If so, you may as well walk, for I don't like taking my oath afore magistrates."

"There's nothing of the sort here; you can trust a man's word, Tom."

"Make it a 'fiver' then," said Buckster. "I don't know what your business is, but I can tell you a good deal more about Ned Jasper than I've let out yet."

"Tell it then," answered Nat Riddel, who drew out a five-pound note and laid it on the table, but without releasing his hold of it.

The guardsman hesitated a moment, and then said in a low voice, "Ned Jasper was a deserter from the 10th Hussars before he went into the Highlanders. It weighed on his mind, because he had done well in the 42nd and in the Guards, and he was afraid he might be nailed any moment, which would have got him fifty lashes, a branding, and six months in quod, besides losing him his place, and a lot more botheration. He fell into such a funk at last that one day he made a clean breast of it to Captain Forester, and hadn't cause to repent it, for the Captain—he was Captain then—behaved to him downright 'andsome, like a thorough gentleman as he is and was. Forester was just then going into the staff as aide-dy'-camp to General Sir Lionel Ryder, so he bought Ned his discharge and took him along with him; but after that he advised him to go on the quiet and give himself up as a deserter, promising to use his hinterest so that he should get lightly 'andled by the court-martial, and promising also to take him back as his servant when he had done his time in prison. Now, if you go to King Street, Westminster, and ask for Sergeant Jerkin, a pensioner on the Recruiting Staff, he'll tell you all about Ned Jasper's giving himself up and getting tried under his Hussar name of Benson. Captain Forester of course tipped a wink to the Hussar officers,—who was lying at Aldershot then,—and Ned got off with no more than eighty-four days in Millbank, without flogging or branding. There, that's the whole truth of it."

"And do you know what year it was that Jasper gave himself up?" asked Nat Riddel, writing down Sergeant Jerkin's name in his note-book.

"Let's see. Captain Forester left the Guards in the summer of

1867. I s'pose it must have been about July in that year when Ned took his court-martial."

"And what has become of Ned's brother that you spoke about?"

"Oh, he's dead. He went off with typhoid fever while Ned was still in the regiment."

The detective passed the bank-note over the table, and put the photographs in his pocket. He had nothing more to ask of Buckster, and being in a hurry to catch the six o'clock train, he ran off to the station. Towards seven he alighted at Paddington.

It was then too late to find Sergeant Jerkin at his recruiting post, so Nat Riddel paid a visit to E—— Street, Pimlico, to cross-question the person in whose house Margaret Field had lodged during her illness. The district was a new-built one, and most of its houses were let in furnished apartments to adventuresses. As these persons find difficulty to settle in old-established streets which have become respectable, they swarm in houses whose walls are not yet dry; and landlords are glad to get them as tenants, for they pay well, are not particular, and lend a semblance of fashion to the streets which they occupy. Hansom cabs and broughams pull up at the different doors at all hours of the day and night. The publican round the corner drives a good trade in wines; hair-dressers and glovers are attracted to the quarter, and a pawnbroker soon follows, who prospers more than all. To organ-grinders, nigger-minstrels, and dog-fanciers these streets offer an assured livelihood, and they are a favourite beat to the strolling florist and the muffin man.

Margaret's landlady was one of a type that abounds here—a person who lodged any sort of women, charged them extortionately, but knew not whence they came nor whither they went. Nat Riddel could extract nothing from her. Twist and twirl her as he would, she was a match for him with her sly composure. She would not admit him beyond the hall mat, but stood holding the door significantly ajar, and fidgetting as though she would hustle him out. When he clumsily hinted at a bribe, she told him she was a respectable woman, requested him to be gone, please, and slammed the door behind him. It is easier to make a stone sphinx speak than a woman who has reasons for being mum.

Nat Riddel had a lodging in St. Pancras, and went to spend the night there. He had *carte blanche* as to his movements from his employers, the Messrs. Gehazi, but omitted to report to them that he had returned to town, though by rights he ought to have done so. The next day he was up betimes, and pacing about between Downing Street and Westminster Bridge in the company of a corporal of lancers, who had promised to "spot" Sergeant Jerkin

as soon as the latter arrived to ply his daily avocation of man-catching. As the sergeant was a long time coming, Riddel turned into the "Blue Post," in King Street, and treated the corporal to a fourpenn'orth of gin and bitters. Non-commissioned officers of all arms crowded the bar of the famous hostelry, proving by their early tipples that recruiting is thirsty work. Some were accompanied by wretchedly tattered lads, whom they had enlisted over-night; and nothing was more ludicrous than to compare these hungry recruits with their captors—the raw material of soldierhood with the showy article made up. A costermonger would be hobnobbing with a gaudy horse-artillery sergeant, who perhaps had been a "coster" himself, but every inch of whose bosom now glittered with gold frogging. A slobbering ploughboy was sharing a pint with a giant heavy dragoon in a gilt helmet with white plume. A bricklayer had been coaxed out of his liberty by the trim blue, white-faced jacket of a carabineer; and even the plain red tunic and glengarry of the linesman found fanciers.

After loitering an hour with the corporal, Nat Riddel received information that Sergeant Jerkin was at St. George's barracks, looking after recruits who were to pass the doctor's examination. This obliged him to walk down Whitehall and cross Trafalgar Square. Proceeding through a gateway under the colonnade of the National Gallery, he knocked at a black postern, and was admitted by an orderly of the Guards, who directed him to a flight of stairs over the canteen, and told him he would find the sergeant in the recruits' room on the first floor.

Pensioner-sergeant Jerkin was there, in effect, keeping watch over some thirty recruits sitting stark-naked on forms ranged round a stove. Others who had been taking a bath in a tank below were drying themselves with their shirts or pocket-handkerchiefs, towels being absent. They were a rough lot, but the sergeant bore good-humouredly with their noise. He held a list, and as fast as names were called over by another sergeant on the landing he told off a batch of half-a-dozen nude candidates, who capered off into the doctor's presence to have their limbs and wind tested. Other Johnny Raws crossed them who had duly passed the ordeal, and who on their return to the waiting-room huddled on their ragged clothes, and received orders to go off to the canteen until they were wanted for the ceremony of "attesting." At such a moment as this it was not to be expected that Sergeant Jerkin should have leisure to answer questions. He told Nat Riddel that he would attend to him presently, and bade him wait awhile on the landing. Not until the last recruit had been disposed of, and not till another last one

(who was late, and came up from the tank dripping) had been pushed with shouts into the doctor's room—not till then did the sergeant pocket his list and turn to the detective.

"Now, sir," said he, "what can I do for you? I can give you five minutes, for I must go home and get my dinner."

"Will you come and dine with me?" answered Riddel. "I want to have a little talk with you about something important."

"Well, sir, I don't mind if I do dine with you; but I must be at the Westminster Police-court by three to see my men attested."

"There will be plenty of time for that," said Riddel; "we will go to the first tavern in our way."

There is no lack of eating-houses in the purlieus round Leicester Square, and the two repaired to one which advertised hot joints always ready. Roast beef and stout were ordered, and the sergeant, who had been talking at the full pitch of his voice about the weather, hung up his shako, and prepared to tackle the viands without appetite. He was a flourishing specimen of the old soldier, all the world over, was Sergeant Jerkin. He had served his twenty-one years, had campaigned in every quarter of the globe, and was proud to boast that he had only had six "drunks" entered against him during all his service. It was not more than a year since he had exchanged his hussar's uniform for the blue frock-coat and crimson sash of the recruiting pensioner; and of course he complained that recruiting was slack, and a sorry trade for a married man with a family. Jerkin did not complain of the amount of spirituous and malt liquors which his functions tempted him to consume, and which made him prematurely blotchy and short of wind. He had a purple face, a grey moustache, and round blue eyes; and, like most of his kind, was uncommonly receptive of small coin. You could not talk with him a minute without his expecting a substantial acknowledgment of his civility, and if this were forgotten he was not bashful in calling attention to the omission. When he discovered in his entertainer a detective on scent, he said roundly, "Now, sir, I think what I am going to tell you won't be too dear at a sovereign for me who've a family to keep."

"Here is the sovereign," said Nat Riddel, and at the same time he laid on the table the two photographs of Edward Jasper or Benson. The waitress had just brought in a glass of steaming brandy-and-water, a pipe, and a screw of shag, as a sequel to some apple dumplings. When she was gone the sergeant took up the portraits and scrutinized them.

"Yes, sir," he began, with a nod, "I do remember the day when Ned Benson came to me and gave himself up as a deserter

from the 20th Hussars. I was still in the 10th myself then, though on recruiting duty, and was standing in uniform near Westminster Bridge, looking out for lads, when Ned comes up to me—as might be you and I talking together—and says he to me, 'Arry,' says he, 'don't you remember Ned Benson? I've come to give myself up to you, for you may as well get the twenty-shilling bounty for catching me as any other.' .

"Mr. What's-your-name, sir, here's your good health," broke off the sergeant, taking a pull at the brandy. "Well, sir, Ned and I had been mates together in the 10th, and I knew all about what drove him to desert. It was the scurvy bullying of a troop-sergeant, nothing else. By Gosh, sir, if you want to know what it is to be sat upon, just try a regiment where the sergeant makes up his mind that you and he don't fit in, and gives you his blessed gas from *reveillé* to 'tattoo.' It all came about along of a gal between Ned and this 'ere sergeant, and from that day Ned couldn't either ride, or march, or lie down but the sergeant found fault with it. I 'xpects he was shoved in the guard-room ten times within a month for having beastly accoutrements or an ill-groomed charger, though there wasn't a cleaner man than Ned in our troop. One day after he had been pitched into as usual about nothing, Ned comes into our barrack-room quite stifling like, and chucks down his sabre on his cot. 'Arry,' says he, 'it aint no use of me trying to soldier here. I'll just step it, else I shall be running my stick through that chap's lungs.' That night he went away, and I never saw no more of him till he came and put his hand in mine three years ago, a-saying he was my prisoner."

Here the sergeant broke off again, remarking, "Here's my sentiment, sir—'*More pigs than parsons*;' " and took a second pull.

"Well now," continued he, wiping his lips with the back of his hand, "I aint ashamed to say that when I saw Ned standing there dressed so respectable, and wanting me to take hold of him for a matter nigh fifteen years old, I felt kind o' hurt, so says I to him: 'Ned, if you thinks I'm the man to have a mate tied up to the halberds for twenty shillings, you must be a-fancying that my 'eart has changed with the colour of my hair. Just you come and have a wet,' says I, 'and then your name 'll be Walker again, for all I shall say to the contrary.' But no, sir, that wasn't Ned's game. He had always been a steady chap, and it seems that for fifteen years he hadn't had a heasy conscience, being allus afraid somebody 'ud turn up at a street corner and lug him by the collar. He told me in a saddish way, but cool as brass, that a hoffer whose servant he was had advised him to face his trial, and had undertook to

make things square about his sentence; but, says he, 'Even if I get flogged, 'Arry, I'll take it without flinching, for I shall be a free man afterwards, and that's what I want.' Consequently, the long and short of it was that me and him went down to Aldershot together, and I gave him up to our provost-sergeant. Three weeks afterwards he stood his court-martial, and his master worked so well for him that the officers wanted to acquit him; but I believe his pleading guilty to everything somehow got in the way of that; so in the end he got three months, without hard labour, 'cat,' or hot iron. That's what I know of Ned Benson, sir; and to speak out my mind, you'd much astonish me if I heard he had been up to anythink likely to get him into trouble, and I 'ope he hasn't, eh?"

"You say three weeks elapsed between Benson's apprehension and court-martial," observed Nat Riddel, disregarding the query; "do you remember in what month he surrendered?"

"July, 'sixty-seven," responded Sergeant Jerkin. "He was tried in August, and his time must have been up in November."

"And now, do you recollect Benson's saying anything to you about his master?" added the detective, lowering his voice a little. "Can you remember, for instance, if he informed you who was going to fill his situation whilst he was in custody?"

"No-a," replied the sergeant, reflectively, as he drew his pipe from his mouth; "we wasn't long together, and in the railway carriage there was other people, so he didn't talk much about his affairs. It was whispered about, I know, that Ned had been in some other regiments, under another name than Benson, and had behaved well there, but nothing of it was mentioned before the court. All I know myself is that on the day after he gave himself up, and whilst I was still at Aldershot, a little French chap came down to see him outside the guard-room and bring him some linen and things."

"A French chap? Are you sure he was a Frenchman?"

"Quite sure; he was a parleyvooint there as I heard 'em do in the Crimea. A bit of fellar no bigger than a tom-cat."

The detective closed his note-book. This Frenchman could only be Robert Dubois, and so the chain of evidence against Forester was complete. So many hours had been spent in grinding and questioning Sergeant Jerkin, who was more fluent than concise, that the afternoon had been encroached upon. After parting with his guest, Nat Riddel had only time to drive to his lodgings and fetch his carpet-bag, and then hurried to King's Cross to catch the mail train for Edinburgh.

CHAPTER XX.

RUN TO EARTH.

THREE days afterwards he was back in Eastshire. He arrived at the Tolminster station about an hour before dusk, and slunk through the town with his coat-collar up, as if he feared to be recognized. He went half a mile out of his way to avoid passing by the gaol, and when he reached the high-road beyond it, walked with rapid steps till he came to a sign-post, which pointed to the right towards Fairdale, to the left towards Gorsemoor; then he branched to the right.

It had been a propitious hunting day, with a southerly wind and a cloudy sky, but the sun had glimmered forth in the afternoon just soon enough to light up the scarlet coats of tired sportsmen as they ambled homewards after two rattling good runs. The detective met Lord Eastshire's pack trotting back to kennels with tongues out and tails down—sixty noble, clean-limbed hounds, in whose midst rode a grizzled huntsman with a short horn slung at his side, followed by a couple of gold-laced "whips," who coaxed up the laggards with words of endearment soothing to doggish ears. At a short distance behind rode the Marquis's son, young Lord Tolminster, the Master of the Hunt, with a troop of friends making the evening air cheery with their laughter. Then came single horsemen, whose hard riding was evidenced by the congealed lather on their nags' flanks, and by the discolouration of their own coat-skirts, reduced to the hue of cranberry mash. Then horsemen in pairs, chewing cigars, and comparing the mud on each other's girths, which was to give their grooms such a fine hour's work by lantern light; and horsemen of farmer degree, who hunted in gaiters and billycocks, riding long-winded brutes whom they ran at London suburban steeplechases during the off-season to recoup themselves for winter's keep. Finally, the detective encountered a gay party, at whose head figured Captain Christy, riding a little in advance of the rest with a young lady in high spirits, whose habit was splashed, and whose hair had been a little tumbled by the exciting chase. Nat Riddel easily knew the dragoon, who bestrode a powerful chestnut seventeen hands high, but he had no knowledge of the young lady who seemed so happy in his company, and who while patting her black mare's mane praised the animal aloud as being a paragon for a "hired" hunter. The party disappeared round the corner of the road to Gorsemoor,

and the detective, who had halted a moment to gaze after them, resumed his walk with a singular expression in his eyes.

He reached Fairdale Park, passed through the lodge gates, and breasted the avenue to the Manor House. Evening had now set in, and the trees were wrapped in the gathering shadows of a night that was to be moonless. The rooks in their high-perched nests had gone to roost, the voices of the smaller birds were hushed, only a startled squirrel bounded across the stranger's path and clambered up the bark of an oak, baulked of the acorn he had gone to fetch for supper. Not a human figure was visible, and not a light. The wind soughed through the branches, breaking off small twigs and stirring such of autumn's dead leaves as were not yet deprived of buoyancy by weeks of soaking on the grass. The gravel of the avenue was heavy with recent rains, and the air damp with a winter mildness.

Straight on walked the detective, like one who knows both where he is going and what he means to do; and as soon as the illuminated windows of the Manor House broke in view he quickened his step. Making for the front door, he pulled the bell, and when the butler opened inquired if Colonel Forester was at home?

"I will see, sir," answered the servant. "Would you give me your card, if you please?"

Instead of handing a card, Nat Riddel parted with a closed envelope, and was shown into a library on the ground-floor. Here he waited ten minutes; then the butler returned, and, requesting him to follow, ushered him upstairs to a spacious apartment which was reserved as Colonel Forester's study during his sojourns at Fairdale. Another twenty minutes elapsed before the visitor's solitude was disturbed, and he had leisure to observe that many things in the room indicated the owner to be a man of not altogether frivolous pursuits. On a side-table, which it entirely covered, lay stretched a coloured map of the Continent, with red and blue-headed pins stuck in to show the positions of the French and German armies at war. Several books of military history and science, with pencils inserted in them as markers, were open on the writing table; which also displayed numerous cartoons from *Vanity Fair*, giving the most droll but speaking likenesses of the foremost actors in the drama of which France was then the theatre. On a leopard-skin rug, draping a broad lounging ottoman, lay that morning's *Daily News*, with the last-arrived letter from Mr. Labouchère, the "Besieged Resident," whose graphic account of the siege of Paris will do more to instruct future students than the works of many graver historians.

The room had three windows closely curtained, and was lit by three globed moderator lamps, forming a chandelier, which shed to every corner that soft brightness so much more pleasing in a study than the glare of gas. All the carpets in the house were so thick that not a footstep could be heard on staircases or in corridors.

At length a handle turned, a velvet door-curtain was pushed aside, and Colonel Forester entered in evening dress. He was handsome and dignified. Bending his head ceremoniously to his visitor, he examined him with a quick glance, and motioned him to be seated. Nat Riddel did not accept a chair, but as soon as the Colonel stood close to him on the buffalo-skin which served as a hearth-rug, he said with a shifty look and voice rather broken by excitement, "Colonel Forester, I am a detective, and I have been instructed to collect evidence as to your intimacy with Margaret Field——"

"One question, please. Who instructed you?" interrupted the Colonel, scarcely changing colour, and perfectly calm, though the attack was sudden as a pistol-shot.

"Mr. Christy, the chaplain of the county prison."

"Then you are not acting by the authority of the Commissioners of Police?"

"I am acting in a private capacity, sir."

"Go on, then," said Philip Forester, who installed himself in an arm-chair, resting his elbow on one of the arms, and shading his mouth with his left hand, which trembled somewhat.

"Well, sir, I have just come from Scotland," said the detective; a little put out by being cut short in the exordium he had prepared. "I have been instituting inquiries in London also, and am in a position to prove that most of the facts deposed to by you on oath at the examination of Margaret Field are—excuse my plainness—false. Whether you ever married the prisoner I confess to not knowing, but it is certain you travelled with her in the autumn of 'sixty-seven, accompanied by Captain Christy and a French servant named Dubois, and it is equally certain that your valet, Edward Jasper, who swore to having been abroad with you at that time, committed perjury, for I hold proof that he was undergoing imprisonment for desertion under the name of Benson."

Forester did not move a muscle. Nat Riddel, who had paused, expecting he would say something, looked embarrassed. He was decidedly a coarse spy, and not used to fencing with men of the world. He coughed before resuming.

"Well, Colonel, I don't want to get you into trouble. I know you're a gentleman; everybody speaks well of you, and I dare say that woman who dragged you into the scrape isn't much better than

others of her sort, who go on the loose with officers and then kick up a noise about it. If you'll make it worth my while I'll hold my tongue, and send such reports to Mr. Christy as shall altogether rid him of his suspicions concerning you. Let us play quite straightforward with each other, sir. I'm a poor man, you see, and can't afford to lose an opportunity of making my fortune. I belonged to the 'Yard' once—Scotland Yard I mean—but I am now employed by the 'General Private Inquiry Agency,' which gives me a great deal of work, and don't pay me so well as it might. I've long had a wish to set up on my own hook, and if you'll sign me a cheque for a thousand pounds I'll place myself in this matter entirely at your orders."

There was a moment's pause. A coal dropped in the grate and sounded loud in the silence.

"What led you to presume that I should entertain such a proposal, Mr. Riddel?" inquired Philip Forester, with unbroken composure.

"Because you're a lost man if you don't, sir," replied the detective, bluntly.

"I should like to hear you prove that," rejoined the Colonel, without any offensiveness in his tone, but apparently with mere curiosity.

"Well, sir, I must have an answer from you before I leave the room," said the detective, whose voice rose, and whose vulgar features kindled at the suspicion that his power was going to be disputed. "You mustn't mind my saying that you've behaved in this affair with all the flatness which you gentlemen show when you do things that aint quite square. You trust to your characters and a bit of gumption to carry you safe through, and you think that because a woman hasn't friends and money to help her nobody'll believe her story. But supposing such a man as Mr. Christy starts up with a purse and character as good as yours, what becomes of you then? Mind, Colonel, I don't say I can save you from trouble; all I can do is to throw that chaplain so completely off the scent that he at all events will never bother you. But if you take my advice you'll act precious gingerly until you've either got that woman safely lodged in Brixton for her attempt on Miss Graham, or else paid her off to keep her tongue quiet; and if I were you I'd send that Edward Jasper of yours out of the way, for if he were cross-questioned before a judge you'd be simply blowded up."

"Where did you gather your suppositions about my servant?" asked the Colonel, whose features were still as hard to see through as a mask.

"There's no secret about it, sir. I got them where anybody else

might obtain them for money." And in a few words the detective recounted his interview with Thomas Buckster and Sergeant Jerkin. When he had remarked on the popularity which Colonel Forester seemed to enjoy in the Guards, he added: "That's a saving clause in your favour, sir. I believe that man Buckster would let his teeth be drawn sooner than appear against you, but still it's never safe to trust these gentry; and it just happens very fortunately for you that Edward Jasper's evidence, which was printed at length in the *Eastshire Chronicle*, was only summarised in the London papers, so that his old friends couldn't have guessed that he'd exactly committed perjury. But, sir, let me warn you again to send this man travelling until the trial is over; for if he doesn't show himself in the witness-box, nobody will be able to prove his identity with Ned Benson. And for your own sake, again, keep an eye on Mr. Christy, for I assure you he's a rum 'un. It's not often one catches a clergyman collecting evidence to blast his own brother."

Colonel Forester lay back in his chair with his knees crossed and his hands folded over them. His white wristbands with gold solitaires, and a large bloodstone ring on one of his fingers, rivetted the detective's eyes.

"Persons who pay hush-money to gentlemen of your sort are apt to repent it, Mr. Riddel," he said, with a pointed look. "When you think you can obtain large sums by threatening, you generally give up working and turn up for fresh sops every time you are hungry."

"I thought you would be too clever to say that, sir. If you'll reflect on it, you'll see I shall have no hold on you," said Nat Riddel, shaking his head. "If once this case is disposed of, how can I turn round on you without exposing myself? There'll be against me the written reports which I shall send to the chaplain, and which would be enough to send me to penal servitude on a conviction for conspiracy. Besides, as I tell you, I want to set up a Private Agency of my own, and I would rather have your patronage, sir, than do you harm. I hope you'll recommend me to your friends; I promise to serve them faithfully."

Colonel Forester was a man of action. He had only bandied words in order to gain time and make up his mind as to what action he should take. He saw that he was in the detective's power, and that to brave him was out of the question. His alternative lay between paying the thousand pounds and enlisting Nat Riddel as his ally, or else making a full confession to Mr. Graham, trusting to the latter's magnanimity to let the engagement with Rose remain unbroken.

But was it likely that a man of Mr. Graham's character would take the same view of the Scotch marriage as he did, and give his daughter to a man who was married in principle if not in law? Philip Forester had told so many untruths, he had heaped up so much iniquity on his first fraud, that he could not limp out of his scrape without leaving his honour in shreds. Judging his position at a glance, he saw that he had advanced too far for retreat. In sum he stood between possible impunity and certain ruin. Feeling this, he accepted the detective's compact.

But he did so without any outward departure from his dignity. He neither admitted the truth of his visitor's charges, nor stooped to humiliating familiarity in his intercourse with him. He simply cast him one of those glances which diplomatists bestow on the infamous subordinate agents whom they are sometimes obliged to use, and which Nat Riddel quickly understood to be as good as a bond.

"And now tell me what reports you mean to send in," said Forester, standing up and rubbing his hands over the fire as if he had grown chilly of a sudden.

The detective looked cautiously round him, as though some listener might have crept into the room unawares, then drew from his pocket-book a sheet of paper, ruled with blue lines and folded.

"See here, sir," he whispered; "this is a page out of the ledger of the Randolph Hotel, where you, Captain Christy, and that woman stayed a whole fortnight. The hotel has changed hands since 'sixty-seven, and nobody there can identify you; but if inquiries are made, all record of your stay has disappeared, for I contrived to tear out this page unseen."

"Are you sure you were not seen?" inquired Forester, unfolding the paper.

"Quite sure, and I shall never be suspected," answered the detective. "I took care not to make any inquiries about 'Captain Field,' for this might have been remembered afterwards. I put up at the hotel and dined there. While dinner was preparing I strolled into the bar, and professed to be looking for traces of a Mr. John Douglas, who had come into some property, and was believed to have stayed in the hotel last year or the year before. The barmaid allowed me to look over the old ledgers that were ranged on a shelf, and as I gave her five shillings for her civility she didn't keep her eyes on me or hurry me. The first time she left the bar to give some order to a waiter I tore this page out—and very neatly, as you can see. I would have tried the same game at the 'Albany Hotel' at B—, which I conclude to be the house where your alleged marriage took place, but in examining the ledgers there I saw you had been entered

simply as 'Captain Field and party ;' besides which, as hundreds of tourists pass through that hotel every year, as the waiters are constantly changing, and as you only stayed one night in the place, it is impossible that your face could be sworn to."

Forester tore up the page from the ledger and threw it into the fire, emitting a murmur of relief. Nat Riddel, after once more looking round, exhibited another photograph—that of Adjutant Dobson, who bore a faint likeness to Forester.

"Please follow me again, sir," said he, with the air of one revelling in his own cunning. "This gentleman looks so like you on paper that his carte might, at a pinch, pass for yours. Well, at one of the small hotels where you stayed—the Bell, at Newcastle—I stopped yesterday night, and was put into room Number 5, which, being the best in the place, I presumed to be the one which you had occupied with Mrs. Field. This morning, as I was paying my bill, I said to the landlady, 'I found this photograph behind the looking-glass over the chimney; it looks for all the world like that of an old friend of mine, Captain Field.' 'Oh, sir, that *is* Captain Field,' said she, staring at it. 'There was a gentleman of that name stayed here three years ago; I remember him well, and his young lady.' I asked leave to keep the photograph, and you may be sure, sir, that if ever Mr. Christy sends it to the 'Bell' by other hands than mine the landlady will repeat that it's Captain Field's. But that's not all, for you see I've 'fried' the carte—that is, removed the artist's name from the back and stuck on another label, which I took from a photograph of my own, done by a poor devil at Islington who is under obligations to me, and will do anything I ask him. Now I shall tell this chap that if inquiries are made he is to answer that this is a portrait of a 'Captain Field,' and I expect he'll only be too glad so to do; for this portrait is by a crack artist, and my friend will be proud to let it be believed that he can work so neatly, and has officers among his customers."

Nat Riddel's audience had already lasted an hour, but he and Forester remained closeted for about thirty minutes until the dinner-bell sounded.

At the end of their conversation the Colonel sat down and wrote a cheque for a thousand pounds.

"I have made it payable in fourteen days," he remarked. "By that time I conclude you will have done all you propose?"

"Perfectly, sir. I shall have settled everything with the chaplain before then," replied the detective, pocketing the draft. "I am much obliged to you, sir. Good evening."

"Good evening," answered Forester, drily.

CHAPTER XXI.

NAT RIDDEL'S ADVENTURES.

As Nat Riddel left Fairdale Manor it was raining in drizzle, and the park, by contrast with the well-lit vestibule, looked black as a cave. The detective had four miles to walk before he could reach Tolminster station and catch the 8.15 train to London, and it being then a little after seven, he needed to put his best foot foremost. It happened that he had not eaten since one o'clock, and being weary from much travelling, felt rather in appetite for a snug dinner at the "Crown" than for fresh journeying; but it was not safe that he should remain a night in Tolminster whilst he was supposed by Michael Christy to be in Scotland. He was bound to start again for the north by the early mail next morning, so as to post off to the chaplain the written reports which had been agreed upon; and there would have been folly in wasting time or running risks for the sake of creature comforts.

It would be a mistake to imagine that Nat Riddel felt the least twinge of compunction for the double-faced part he was acting; his sensations were of quite an opposite character. Detectives, like diplomatists, are creatures of cunning; their keenest delights come of craftiness triumphant, and the vanity that is in them is not the less agreeably tickled when they make their unscrupulousness serve private ends instead of those of their employers. To be habitually deceitful, to mix on familiar terms with criminals, to study society by its seamy side alone, and to remain in spite of all strictly honourable and trustworthy is given to few. Nat Riddel had frequently levied petty black-mail from small rogues who had got into his power, but this was the first time he had seen his way to pick up a big plum in perfect safety. The instant the opportunity came he seized it.

He was ambitious of respectability. His dream was to sit in a handsome office, with a mahogany bureau before him, to have an account at a bank, a suburban villa, where he should return of an evening after business to dine with a wife in a silk dress. He wished for a cellar-full of sherry, and a pew of his own in a church. If he could once get a little capital to start him he would set up a Private Agency which should enjoy the exclusive patronage of the "swells;" and no one should have such a name as he for conducting divorce cases with secrecy and despatch. Private Inquiry offices

play an important part in our social system now-a-days, and Nat Riddel knew what fat profits can be made out of them.

As he trudged through the park, splashing his sixteen-shilling trousers, and feeling at his pocket to assure himself that the cheque was safe, visions of the schemes which he was now in a position to realize put his brain into a fever. He talked to himself, but amidst all this there was uppermost in his mind a feeling of intense admiration for Colonel Forester, who had kept him so beautifully at arm's length, even while succumbing to him.

"The fellow is a d—d scoundrel," muttered he, "but I wish I had his nerve."

He meant manners as well as nerve, and was coveting something beyond the scope of his imitative faculties, though he was conscious of how invaluable such manners would be to him in his profession. To copy a gentleman was more than Nat Riddel was equal to. He could play the officer well enough to deceive a barmaid, but not a private soldier; he had passed himself off as a university man, but found it convenient to drop the mask in the presence of a curate or a quick schoolboy; he had once put on a barrister's wig and gown to obtain a seat in a court of justice, and was surprised that he had been detected as an interloper by a true wigsman with whom he had exchanged but six words. Yet Nat Riddel was as sharp at seeing through the pretences of a swell-mob as he was incapable of defining wherein such a person fell short of true gentility. How can an English detective (often a promoted police-sergeant) define the *je ne sais quoi* which constitutes the gentleman? What can he know of clubs, colleges, or regimental messes? Who would introduce him into a drawing-room—as continental spies are presented—to worm secrets out of a gentlewoman by making love to her? The very key in which society pitches its voice is one to which he can never modulate his heavy tongue. He cannot bow without bobbing, nor pry without staring, nor talk without tripping over some little nicety of speech, like a bullock over a flower-pot. Persiflage is too much for him; drawing-room slang mystifies him like Greek; he tries in vain to master the nomenclature of French dishes, the pronunciation of names like Cholmondeley and Marjoribanks; the meaning of bishops' signatures (Exon, Oxon, Roffen, &c.), and the lore of the peerage, with its complications of lords who are not peers, "ladies" who are the wives of esquires, and lords (of session) whose wives are not "ladies." Therefore when a detective has to deal with a high-life gentleman, full of knowledge and graces which are not to be acquired nor counterfeited, he feels his ascendancy, as Nat Riddel did Colonel Forester's. To this man Margaret Field's

persecutor appeared as the incarnation of social prestige, and his very villany looked admirable from its cold effrontery.

"How coolly he chucked me that thousand pounds!" thought Riddel. "I wish now I had asked him for two thousand."

On he walked in the rain, and presently passed out of Fairdale Park into the high-road, but here he was moved by the ill-timed ambition to take a short cut. This resolution beguiled him among some turnips, whose dripping tops soaked his socks. His balmorals sank deep into squashy mud, and a gust carried off his hat into a ditch. When he had recovered it and was climbing a stile, his umbrella was blown inside out, and he stepped down into a puddle.

"Confound the country!" exclaimed Nat Riddel. "There's nothing like Oxford Street, after all."

He perceived a row of lights, and waded off in that direction. He had turned his back upon Tolminster without knowing it, and a piece of rising ground brought him suddenly in view of a black-smith's forge, which projected its ruddy glare into the roadway. Two smiths, black as devils, were at work; the one plying a hammer upon an anvil, which sent forth showers of sparks at each resounding stroke, the other pulling a bellows-rope, and directing the current of air upon a horse-shoe, which blazed white-hot. At the forge door a man was jumping into a tax-cart, drawn by a grey horse, who had just been shod. The driver gathered up his reins, and set off at a jogging trot, leaving the road deserted.

"I suppose that is the forge where the accident happened to Miss Graham," murmured Riddel, and he approached it to ask the smiths his nearest way to the town.

He had almost reached the circle of light where he would have become visible, when words fell upon his ear which made him stop. The two men were talking in very sonorous tones, that they might hear each other despite the din of the hammer, and their conversation had a serious purport. Instead of revealing himself, Nat Riddel crept round to the forge's side. The overhanging roof gave him shelter against the drizzle, and every word was distinctly audible to him as he stood behind the angle of the open door against which the rain pattered softly.

"I tell 'e, if there's e-ought on ya mind 'e'd best say ut, Bill," cried the man at the bellows, who was evidently the master, and spoke in a broad Eastshire dialect.

"There's nowt on ma mind," replied the other with the hammer and tongs; "on'y a want to go teu 'Merikey—that's all."

"How can 'e go to 'Merikey afore the trial of that 'ooman! Ye'll have to appear as wutness—'e know ut."

"Dan' the 'ooman," said Bill. "A've got a che-ance of goin' to settle with ma brother in Kaliforny, and a'll go."

"'Oo'll pay ya passage? for 'e aint a saving che-ap, Bill Scadding," rejoined the master. "Is it Colonel Forester? 'E had a laing talk wi' um yustudday."

"Tusn't ony mein's busness where I gets ma money. A've worked for 'e honest enough, Muster Mardles, and 'e must be satisfied wi' that," said the man addressed as Scadding.

He spoke almost menacingly, and threw down his hammer in a corner, saying it was time to go home. The other ceased blowing his bellows, but he was an obstinate fellow, though white-headed, and when he had smothered his fire under a shovelful of coal-dust he approached his servant, who was putting on his jacket, and spoke close to his ear: "Look 'e here, Bill, I was he-aving a talk with God Almighty this marning, and says I to him, 'Lord, I think ma mein Bill has been telling a lie about that young 'ooman in Tolminster Gaol;' and says the Lord, answering me through ma mind as he allus does when I questions wi' humility, 'Yes, he has.'"

"Give up that now, measter; I de-on't want preaching to," said Bill, impatiently.

"'E looks as if 'e did," retorted old Mardles; "and the Lord guv' me a message for 'e. Says he, 'Just tell Bill Scadding that a've got an eye on 'um, as he'll soon fe-ind out if he de-on't turn from his wuckedness that he has committed, and den that which is lawful and right.'"

"That's all ya talk—that is. A'm off to the 'Chequers.'"

"Good night, then," said old Mardles, "but think on the Lord's mmessage. Ye are a cheanged character, Bill. On that day when Muss Graham was blinded yeu and God Almighty were alone in this farge to see what happened, and since then ya spirits is low, and 'e drink more 'an ya wages. A've watched 'e replyin' to the people that came here a sight-seeing, and 'e said neow one thing, neow another. Ut's fear makes 'e want to go to 'Merikey, but the Lord 'll walk after 'e, and stick to 'e close, till He brings 'e on ya knees."

"I tell 'e that 'ooman blinded Muss Graham a purpose. A've told it 'e afore, and dan' 'e for not believing ut!" blurted out Bill Scadding, with an oath, and he strode out, making his curses resound in the night.

Old Mardles shook his head, and stood for a moment looking pensively after Scadding's retreating figure. Then he proceeded to shut up his forge. There was no light in it now but that of a

flickering tallow-candle, and as the blacksmith came out with the iron bar which was to fasten the folding doors, he started to see Nat Riddel, who cropped up as if from underground. The detective explained that he had lost his way, and wished to reach Tolminster by a quarter-past eight.

"Pity 'e warn't here ten minutes since, sir; there was Farmer Cripps might 'a taken 'e in his cart," answered old Mardles; "howsomever, keep straight on,"

"Is this the forge where Miss Graham of Fairdale met with an accident?" asked Riddel, as though from mere curiosity, as he turned to go.

"Yas, sir, it is. Many have coom to ask that question these last four months, but there aint anything particular to see in the farge. If 'e wants to see ut, though, 'e'd best coom in the daytime, when my man Bill's here. He acts as showman."

"Thank you. Good night," said Nat Riddel.

"Good night, sir," answered the blacksmith. "'E'll have to walk fe-ast to catch ya train."

The detective set off with a quick stride down the sloppy road, shutting up his umbrella to go the faster. He had heard enough to convince him that Bill Scadding was in a position to say more about the assault at the forge than had gone forth to the public; and that Colonel Forester, after purchasing his silence, had come to the conclusion that it was better to get him out of the way altogether. Perhaps Bill had overheard part of the conversation between the Colonel and Margaret Field, and had caught an avowal from the former as to his previous relations with the woman. Nat Riddel presently overtook Scadding, shaking the wet out of his clothes at the door of a small beer-shop with the sign of the 'Chequers,' and he noted the fellow's big limbs and dogged countenance. Bill slouched into the public-house as if it was his familiar resort, and this was a bad token. There is little faith to be placed on country folks who drink.

Nat Riddel tried to examine as he walked whether the fact of Philip Forester's secret being in so many hands already was likely to be dangerous to himself, and in his excited frame of mind he thought it would be. He had his thousand pounds, but an exposure might somehow force him to fly the country as an accomplice in a fraud, and this did not suit him. Having covenanted to serve Colonel Forester, he perceived that his own interest counselled his doing so to the utmost, and he fell to at once making plans as to how Margaret Field might be drawn closer and closer into the meshes woven round her.

He was now within view of Tolminster, over which floated that pink haze which canopies cities by gas-light. He had walked so fast that he was in a perspiration, and just as he breasted the suburbs he heard eight o'clock strike from the cathedral belfry. Had reliance on the punctuality of railway companies been one of his guiding principles he might have given up his spurt, for he was still two miles from the station; but he pounded on, jostling himself a not uncursed passage through some crowded slums, and reached the station in good time to hear that his train was over-due.

"There's a fog up the line, sir," said the porter, in whose custody he had left his bag, and to whom he gave a shilling. "The train is not yet signalled at Chalkley, the station above this."

"Shall I have time to get some refreshment, then?" asked Riddel, who was breathless and streaming.

"Yes, sir, you may have to wait ten minutes yet, and I'm afraid that if the train don't come in by that time you'll hardly reach London before half-past eleven, for you'll have to be shunted at Blackbridge Junction to let the express go by."

"How far is Blackbridge from here?" asked Riddel, who now wanted to reach town as soon as possible.

"A matter of eighteen mile, sir," replied the porter, consulting the time-table. "If you can reach it before nine, well and good, for the express aint timed to pass Blackbridge till a quarter after, but if you can't you'll have to let the express go by and maybe lose an hour."

Sundry passengers were grouped on the platform complaining of the fog, as if it were the railway company who were to blame for it. Nat Riddel betook himself to the refreshment-room to swallow a glass of sherry and buy two sausage rolls, but, anxious to avoid being seen, he went outside the station to eat. He had just sat down on a hamper in a corner near the luggage-room whence he could see into the station, when he was accosted by a shabby young woman whom he had noticed prowling about to beg. A shabby child, whose teeth chattered, clung to her gown.

"For pity's sake, my good gentleman, pay me my journey to London with the child," she said, supplicatingly.

Nat Riddel, whose mouth was full, motioned her to be gone.

"So help me God, sir, it's not drink-money I want," continued the woman. "You look a kind gentleman. See, I'll tell you the truth. I've just done a month in prison. They let me out this morning, and gave me a shilling, which aint enough to take me and the child to London with. I've friends in London who'll help me to a situation if I get there, but I don't know a friendly soul in this town, and haven't a place where to go and sleep."

"What were you put in prison for," asked Riddel.

"It's all along o' this child's father, sir, who refuses to support him. He's a respectable grocer, and I used to be his servant, but when he wouldn't own to the child being his, and allow me money for his keep, I broke his shop windows, so they gave me a month in prison."

"And now you want to go to town and break his windows again?"

"No, sir," said the woman, earnestly; "he lives in Tolminster, he does, and I want to get away so that I mayn't have the temptation to be at him again. I came from London a purpose to see him, and it cost me dear enough. My name is Mary Dash, sir, and you may ask Mrs. Baillie, the matron at the gaol, if my conduct wasn't good in prison."

"You look as if you had been drinking," remarked Riddel. However, he put his hand to his pocket. Prisoners are the class who draw most sympathy from detectives; besides which, having made such a good haul that day, Nat was disposed to be generous, like a gamester for luck's sake. He gave the woman half-a-sovereign and was loaded with vociferous blessings, which he cut short by telling her to go and take her ticket. At this moment the signal-bell rang in the telegraph office, and the porter beckoned to intimate that the train was coming.

The green lights above the signal-box had been turned outwards, a pointsman worked his lever, and, like the two eyes of a huge crawling snake, the white lanterns of the approaching train loomed in sight. In a minute the engine shot alongside, and the driver was heard complaining that he and the stoker had been on duty sixteen hours and wanted their suppers. Nat Riddel leaped into a third-class carriage and was followed by Mary Dash and her child. The porter, running up to shut the door, said, "The driver is going to put on steam, sir, so as to reach Blackbridge in time. You'll just do it." "All right!" cried the station-master from the platform, and blew his whistle. He was answered by a puff of steam ahead, and the engine was off again.

Eighteen miles to be done in as many minutes, and the engine in charge of two weary, ravenous men! No wonder Nat Riddel's fellow-passengers found that the pace was fast and that their carriage jolted oddly. There was a woman with a baby, a mechanic in fustian, her husband, with a boy of three between his knees; an old woman grasping a basket, from out of which peeped a bottle; a servant-girl in holiday finery; and a young whiskerless parson, in a wide-awake, who held a dog-collar and chain, but no dog. All these

persons, except the old woman, seemed amused at the rapidity of their progress, and the servant-girl giggled to the man in fustian that it was a deal pleasanter than crawling along as they had done in the fog. Mary Dash said nothing, but held her child on her knees and let him look out of the window. A thin mist from recent rains blurred the outlines of the country through which they were passing, and left the eye nothing to rest on. Cottage lights flitted by like sparks; rivers glinted a moment and were gone; on both sides of the way the trees and telegraph posts fled like soldiers of an army in rout; and the oscillation caused the travellers to rock one against the other and to laugh—the workman telling his baby-boy that “t’ iron gee-gee had run away wi’ ’em.”

“Lawd o’ mussy, but this be tew fast!” at length ejaculated the old woman with the bottle. “Oh! . . . what’s that?”

Even as she was speaking she and her neighbour were thrown asunder, and Nat Riddel was pitched between them. In the momentary silence of horror that followed, whilst every tongue was paralyzed with a sudden shock, the lamp-wick flared up and showed the two mothers clasping their children. It was but a glimpse, then all became darkness. The carriage was rammed forward, lurched, and recoiled with starting planks. Bodies were huddled together, windows and roofing crashed, and the deadly blackness of the night was filled with harrowing shrieks.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CROSSBRIDGE ACCIDENT.

THE train had run off the line, and, colliding against the buttress of a bridge, had “telescoped” the three carriages nearest the tender; then the engine exploded, covering the ruins with a deluge of red coals and scalding water. But this was not all, for as the shattered carriages lay across the railway, and the survivors were crawling out of the wrecked compartments, or groping in the dark for missing friends, whose agonizing cries rendered them distraught, the express, which no danger-signal or “block system” had stopped, came thundering down at the rate of fifty miles an hour, and charged into the splintered heaps like a squadron of mailed horse into a broken square of infantry. This comparison is weak, however, to describe what really happened, for nothing can equal the

appalling havoc of two trains coming into collision. It is only a merciful dispensation which prevents such accidents from being as disastrous as they might be.

The neighbouring fields became luminous with the rays of approaching lanterns, for the explosions had resounded far and wide, and country people were hurrying from their homes to bear assistance. A few minutes ago the passengers in the two trains were full of life, and now—in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed—the scene was converted into a field of carnage, with an improvised ambulance-corps to relieve the wounded and collect the dead. Bonfires were lit with the splinters of wood. Two surgeons—the one himself a passenger—were at work making bandages out of torn linen. Unhinged carriage doors were converted into stretchers, and twenty corpses were deposited on the grass of the embankment, where the ruddy smoke of the bonfires threw flitting gleams on their features.

Among those who most distinguished themselves in the task of succour was the young clergyman who had travelled in the third-class carriage with Nat Riddel. Bleeding from a fragment of glass which had cut his right ear and cheek, he gave no heed to himself, but laboured in his shirt-sleeves with a quiet energy which set an example to others. One stout-hearted man does wonders in a scene of panic, for he makes idle lamentations to cease, and shows the mourners that it is not their tongues but their hands they must use. The courageous parson's brain must have reeled more than once at the sight of ghastly mutilations and at the sound of piercing cries wrenched from physical suffering or yet more torturing grief. The mother and her two children had been killed, and the father, whose legs were crushed, clasped their mangled bodies, uttering fearful sobs over those whom he was no more to look upon alive. The young servant-girl was gashed and bedaggled beyond recognition, but still living, and screamed fearfully every time she was touched; the old woman with the bottle had been slaughtered outright, so had Mary Dash and her child. As always happens in these catastrophes, there were some cases of miraculous preservation. Thus, the stoker of the London train, one of the originators of the accident, had been shot over the bridge like a cricket-ball, and had taken a header into the stream, whence he floundered out unhurt but stupid, and maundering that he had been sixteen hours on duty and wanted his supper. A lady walked about whimpering that she had lost a basket of eggs; a young man sat by one of the bonfires warming his hands over the flames, and uttering peals of laughter like an idiot.

When the clergyman had done all that could be done, when he had toiled a full hour, and seen that all the wounded were in good hands, he was free to look after himself, but instead of doing so he turned his attention to yet another victim, who was not a human being, but a dog. Locked in one of the compartments allotted to his species, this member of the brute creation had, from first to last, indulged in frightened howls, which reassured his master as to his being alive, but left him uncertain and uneasy as to whether he were hurt. The parson and the dog were old friends, and although the latter's conduct under circumstances where stoicism was in demand might be judged as reprehensible, yet the master could not but make allowances for one who, shut out from the sight of others' pain, thought only of his own.

Climbing over the broken tires of wheels, he attained the dog-box, and, catching up a bar of iron, inserted it into the keyhole and prised the door open. Out tumbled a wiry-haired terrier, who, emitting a low growl of disgust, scampered off with his ears laid back and his tail between his legs. Railway mismanagement was not a thing which this dog could comprehend by intuition, and he had only to reason on the fact of his having been subjected to unaccustomed indignity and terror; so, having galloped out of everybody's reach, he turned round to deliver his protest in a series of piping barks, which grew the more shrill as attempts were made to appeal to his feelings. It required five minutes and much tact before his clerical master could whistle him up and cajole him into the condition when dogs forget their woes. Once "Touzle" had made his peace, he trotted at his owner's heels, pausing now and then with fore-paw uplifted to sniff the mystery that was in the air, but evincing a gradual disposition to distribute sympathy all round, and even to make himself useful.

By this time the whole country-side had been roused, and the roads were crowded with the breaks and carts of the neighbouring gentry and farmers. The rich brought rugs and cordials, the poor straw; and parties were organized for carrying away the wounded into houses compassionately opened to receive them. In this work of coming and going the young clergyman found he could take no part, for loss of blood had made him feel faint, and he was compelled to sit down by the road-side, bathing his ear with water from a rain-pool. Whilst he remained there unattended to, because he asked for nothing, Touzle gaddled to and fro in quest of adventure, and, as is the mode of dogs, thrust his nose into a variety of places where no business called him. In so doing he alighted upon something that made him start, then sniff again and scratch the earth,

barking loudly. There was so much significance in his noise that his master was attracted to the spot, and, under a mass of broken wood and twisted iron-work, saw a human hand protruding.

This was in the front part of the wreckage, and it suddenly struck the clergyman that he had not seen the passenger with the wet hat who had entered the train at Tolminster. He was the only one among his fellow third-class passengers who remained unaccounted for ; and, stooping to remove some planks which hid the man's face, the succourer recognized the person with the dark moustache and whiskers,—that is, Nat Riddel.

Weak as he was, the clergyman endeavoured to extricate him alone, but the task was beyond his power ; so he shouted for assistance, and half a dozen helpers arrived to join in lifting up the ruins, which were so jammed together that they formed a cage-work over the body. The operation was a difficult one, for an uprooted telegraph-pole had to be used as a lever, and there was some danger lest in disturbing the jammage the over-topping hulls of two carriages should fall through. But, thanks to the unhesitating devotion of the minister, who crawled into an aperture at the risk of being himself buried alive, the body was freed from its trammels and hauled out. A doctor soon pronounced that life was not extinct, and the application of a flask to the sufferer's lips caused him to sit up and inquire feebly what had happened. He was not wounded, but complained of feeling bad all over. An attempt which he made to stand up resulted in his falling down, and his mind wandered. The doctor, after carefully feeling the limbs and spine, said it was an ordinary case of nervous concussion, for which there was no present remedy but rest, and so ordered the patient to be carried away on a stretcher. Then he turned his lantern upon the clergyman, who was a horrible spectacle with his face and shirt-sleeves all covered with blood, and said, "Why, bless me, you're in a worse case than he ! Come, sit down here and let me dress your face for you."

"Oh, I shall do very well, I can afford to wait until the others are attended to," said the modest hero, who could hardly stand upright.

"Do very well with the lobe of your ear nearly gone, and your cheek-bone laid open," grumbled the doctor. "Keep still a moment ; that's it. Now you'll have lock-jaw if you don't mind. Here, somebody, take care of this patient, and see that he doesn't exert himself."

Some kindly hands took the young man under the arms and supported him down the embankment out into the road, where the

carriages were. The crowd was now so dense that they could hardly advance. A number of cottagers' children half-dressed were pressing together to see the dead bodies ; a publican had brought out a table, a barrel, and some mugs, and was selling refreshments ; a mountain of luggage had been stacked under a dry arch of the bridge, and some unharmed passengers were mounting guard over it (for it seems a good Samaritan had already tried to decamp with a dressing-case). There were bereaved women sitting about everywhere in the wet, with their faces buried in their handkerchiefs, and some amateur reporters were hurrying hither and thither with note-books to collect details, and did not scruple to question even hatless, crying men—who had just lost wife or child—as to their names, begging them to add accounts of their sensations which would do for the newspapers.

The good and the trivial elbow each other on every corner of the stage of life, but great calamities seldom, or never, appeal in vain to the best feelings of human nature. Householders, who a few hours ago would have thought twice about giving a passing beggar twopence, had now thrown their dwellings wide open, and were freely surrendering all they had—linen, bedding, food—without hope of recompense. The most dangerously wounded had been conveyed to the houses nearest the line, the less serious cases were conducted to others further off, but everywhere the hospitality was the same. The indigent and the well-to-do with an equal readiness owned the cousinship of misfortune. As the young clergyman and his guides advanced, closely following the litter on which Nat Riddel was laid, pitying hands beckoned to them from a dozen different doors to come in. But the two parties had been taken charge of by an elderly Quaker with a broad-brimmed hat, a flowing white beard, and golden spectacles ; who, striding beside them and flourishing a walking-stick, exclaimed, "Nay, nay, these good people have guests enough, I will take ye to the house of my daughter Violet."

And, showing the way, this gentleman continued talking :—"It was my son-in-law, Joseph Tabor, who dressed thine ear. Truly he appeared to have travelled in the same train with thee, and saw death face to face, but the Lord's hand was stretched forth to save ye both. Joseph Tabor hath been tending the wounded in France, and hath experience in healing : he hath told thee thou must rest, and thou must do his bidding."

Dr. Tabor's house stood in the bend of a village lane, and was an Elizabethan structure, having a garden in front and another behind. Every window in the façade was lit up, and servant-maids could be seen moving about with sheets and mattresses to make up beds in

the spare rooms. A lady stood on the threshold of the open door, and received the wounded with words of sympathy, not couched in the Quaker tongue. She was a well-looking person, three or four years on the right side of thirty, and her manners were those of a young wife who is mistress of a happy home. By her orders the two sufferers were conveyed each to a separate room, where the Quaker and a gardener helped to undress them and put them to bed. Their exhaustion was so great that they both fell to sleep without having spoken a word to enlighten their hosts who they were; but "Touzle," who had followed his master into the house, had unceremoniously leaped on to his bed, like one who is accustomed to sleep at the foot thereof; and the Quaker read on his collar this inscription: "*The Rev. Peter Vigus, belongs to me.*"

Mrs. Tabor could have accommodated several more patients under her roof, and her father went out to see if he could find any, but all had been conveyed under shelter, so the Quaker volunteered his services for superintending the removal of the corpses to the covered skittle-alley of the village tavern that was to be used as a dead-house.

Judging by the patriarchal tone in which he issued his orders to the bumpkins of the neighbourhood, he seemed to be a personage of local consideration, and everywhere he was received with affectionate respectfulness, mixed, however, with a spice of amusement, as if he were an old gentleman of slightly weak intellect, known for his inordinate benevolence. He was profuse in directing that straw should be laid under the dead bodies, and that blankets should be spread over them to conceal all but their faces. Thus ordering and moving about, he never ceased to talk, but scattered his words of comfort among those who needed it, and urged the timid or the lagging to bestir themselves. When he had done his work in one direction he was off in another, and spent the better part of the night in visiting the houses where the maimed lay, delighted at every opportunity of promising, doing, or giving something.

All this while his son-in-law, Dr. Tabor, was busy from house to house, renewing a bandage here, performing an amputation there—working everywhere in a prompt, silent, masterly style. He was a strongly-built man of about thirty-five, with a high forehead, a red beard, and blue eyes beaming with power. His name had latterly been mentioned eulogistically by the newspapers for his services in the ambulance hospitals on the Continent, and his presence in England at this moment was owing to his having been delegated to come home and provide himself with a fresh staff and materials.

He had been overtaken by the railway accident as he was returning from the North with a cargo of lint and medicines, and with two young assistant physicians, both of whom had unhappily been wounded. Neither the doctor nor the Quaker took any rest through the night, and it was not till daybreak that they returned to their house to partake of the breakfast prepared by Mrs. Tabor, who had sat up awaiting them.

Meanwhile Nathaniel Riddel had slept a heavy sleep, but at the break of dawn he awoke and became conscious of what had occurred. He remembered the railway journey, and had a dim perception of having fallen through the floor of a carriage in a crash; by-and-by he had felt his mouth full of brandy, and found himself lying on the ground with a crowd of people round him. This was all of the night's doings that he could piece together, but, straight as a crow, his black thought flew to the objects of his journey—to his bargain with Colonel Forester—to the mission he had to perform in Scotland—to the necessity under which he lay for wasting no time in the prosecution of the Colonel's designs.

Sitting up with an agony of apprehension on his face, he felt his limbs to ascertain if any of them were broken, then his head and his neck; but finding no bandages, and experiencing nothing save an exceeding lassitude and a sort of numbness in his finger-tips, he crept out of bed and essayed to put his clothes on.

It was with the utmost difficulty that he could draw on his trousers. All the muscles in his body seemed unstrapped, and when he tried to fasten his braces his hands could only fumble at the button-holes. He leaned, half-sitting, against his bed, unable to keep his feet. At a move forward which he made he sank to his knees, and being powerless to raise himself, muttered, "My God I'm done for," he pulled a bell within reach.

The summons brought up Dr. Tabor and the Quaker, who exclaimed at the patient's imprudence and lifted him into bed again. He was told that his only chance of quickly regaining strength lay in his keeping quiet till further orders; but the Quaker, hearing him moan something about the anxiety of friends, offered to write any letter he might desire, or despatch a telegram. The honest Puritan, whose pate, bare of its hat, looked like an egg with a bordering of swan's-down, explained that the place where they were was called Crossbridge, and had no railway station; but there was a station at Blackbridge, two miles off, to which he would cheerfully walk to send a message. After considerable hesitation and languid inquiries as to whether there was any chance of his being able to move that day, the detective at length consented to dictate a telegram

for "Colonel Forester, Fairdale Park, Eastshire :—*Have met with an accident. Not much hurt, but disabled. Please come to Dr. Tabor's, Ivy House, Crossbridge.*"

As the Quaker blotted the paper, Dr. Tabor, who had left the room, returned with a hypnotic of chloral, which soon threw the patient into a second sleep, that lasted without intermission till midday. So sound was it that he heard nothing till he was abruptly roused by feeling a hand on his shoulder. He started from his slumbers and saw Colonel Forester standing over him.

No one else was in the room. Once again Nat Riddel had to make an effort to collect his thoughts.

He raised himself on his pillow with a wry face, as if all his bones were out of joint.

"I am very sorry for what has happened, sir," he faltered, incoherently. "It wasn't my fault."

"Of course not," replied the Colonel, with cold sympathy. "Are you much hurt?"

"I don't know what's the matter with me, sir. Have you spoken to the doctor?"

"I have seen nobody but an old Quaker, who showed me the way to your room. He said you might be a week bedridden."

"A week, sir! Then I shall never be able to go to Scotland in time. What shall we do?"—and there was despair in the man's voice.

Colonel Forester was standing by the bedside removing his dog-skin gloves. It was an untoward thing for him that this accident had happened, but in a brusque tone he asked, "Does Mr. Christy know your handwriting?"

The detective shook his head.

"And you say he insisted on your sending reports during your travels?"

"Yes, sir, he was particular about it. I ought to have written to him already; but I'm not fit to hold a pen now."

"There is no help for it then. I will write the reports myself, have them copied, and send somebody to the North to post them."

There was stationary on the table. Without a moment's loss of time Colonel Forester drew the table near the bed and sat down to write, reading out occasional passages of what he wrote rather for the detective's instruction than his approval. The latter, propped on an elbow, nodded.

For a whole hour the two remained together, and the last portion of their conference was breathed in whispered tones, which not even a mouse could have heard. As the Colonel put on his hat to go,

Nat Riddel requested him to claim and send up a carpet-bag from the luggage store, but not to give the name of Riddel, lest it should be published in the papers among the list of victims. It was agreed that whilst he remained at Ivy House the detective should go by the name of Johnson, and pass for a former servant of Colonel Forester's.

Having promised to call and see Riddel again, the Colonel descended the staircase, buttoning his coat over the letter he had written. Mrs. Tabor and her father stood in the hall, looking at the throngs of people whom the morning trains had brought down to view the scene of the railway accident. These people, by their indiscreet curiosity and loud conversations, were already converting the village into a noisy fair.

Seeing the stranger, the mistress of the house moved into the parlour and politely invited him to enter.

The Colonel could not do less than thank this lady for the hospitality she had extended to his supposed servant, and he acquitted himself of this duty with his habitual courtesy. But whilst he was winning excellent opinions by his address and mien, his face suddenly flushed, his tongue stammered, and his eyes became rivetted on an oil painting that hung over a chiffonniere. It represented two sisters, as could be seen by the likeness of their eyes, though their general features were not similar. The one was the lady before him—but the other?

The other was Margaret Field.

"May I know to whom I am indebted for the care taken of my poor friend?" said Colonel Forester, recovering himself as he could and bowing.

"I am the wife of Dr. Tabor," answered the lady, with a blush and a smile. "This is my father—Mr. Hawthorne."

"And thou owest us no thanks, friend," remarked the Quaker. "We have done no more for thine than thou wouldest do for ours, if the Lord sent us to knock at thy gate."

It was Margaret Field's father who thus spoke.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MORE PLOTS.

PHILIP FORESTER was no fatalist, but when Hazard had thus brought him into contact with Mr. Hawthorne he turned for a moment sick at heart. There was a providential look in this chance, and it threw a dark shadow over his mind, the shadow of advancing troubles. Casting another glance at Margaret's portrait, he left Ivy House terrified, having scarcely touched the hand which the kindly Quaker extended to him.

What were the thoughts which then marked a frown like a horseshoe between his eyebrows, which made him mutter to himself as he walked, and plunged him into a long meditation as he stood on the station platform waiting for the train to Tolminster? Clouds on the brain, gathering over the face of that sun called Conscience, obscuring its light, bringing inner darkness and fear, and the creeping out of all those vermin thoughts that dare only issue from their holes in the night. But it *was* night to this man, for he might have been alone for all he noticed of the people round him here, and of others who journeyed in the same train as he to Tolminster.

He had to get those reports posted, and meant to send them off as they were, for there was not a soul whom he could trust to copy them. But before going to Fairdale and despatching his servant Jasper on this errand, he went to Tolminster barracks to look up Frank Christy. He found the dragoon smoking alone in his room, and the pair held a long conference. Both had confessions to make.

It came out then that Frank had let Mrs. Baillie guess Margaret's maiden name. Philip on his side disclosed that the blacksmith was beginning to have suspicions, and that it would be necessary to send Bill Scadding out of the way. When, however, he added the account of how Nat Riddel had called upon him, of the investigations in Scotland at Michael's expense, of the Crossbridge accident, and of his meeting with Mr. Hawthorne, Frank was fairly stunned. It is always startling to hear that an opponent has been at work in the dark, while we relied upon his inactivity; but when that opponent is one's own brother! . . . Frank had not suspected Michael capable of so much resolution.

"By Jove, if he springs mines upon us in this way I'll give him a piece of my mind," he exclaimed, angrily, throwing down a valuable meerschaum so that it broke. Then he lapsed into a querulous

mood. "I wish to God you had not led us into this mess. If you had told the truth in the first instance Mr. Graham would have appreciated your straightforwardness. Anyhow matters couldn't have become worse than they are now. Here am I, whom you never consulted, dragged into a lot of plots that will bring me to smash. I should like to back out of it."

This was the first time Frank had rebelled against Philip's authority, the first time he had talked of backing out. He stood with his back to the mantelshelf looking furious. Philip, who was quite collected, and kept the closer guard over his temper as he saw Frank exasperated, explained that all retreat was cut off. He did not see things in a black light, unless anything new occurred while Nat Riddel was under Dr. Tabor's roof. The reports drawn up by connivance with the detective would throw Michael off the scent. Philip proposed sending Edward Jasper that night to post them in Scotland; after which Jasper should go and find Robert Dubois, who was in Paris, and warn him to be reticent in case questions should be put to him.

Frank listened moodily, and pointed out that if Jasper and Bill Scadding were both absent at Margaret's trial their disappearance would provoke comment. They were the two most important witnesses. Hereupon Philip, who was seated near the fire, asked whether his friend were ready to second him in yet one more plan, for he had been turning over an idea which it would require their joint energies to execute? He was minded that Margaret should not be brought to trial at all. Frank started, but Philip left him no time for objections, and divulged his idea.

"We can't let Margaret be tried," he repeated, rising and pacing about the room. "Your brother will stand by her, and we shall be lost. I have been pondering over it as I came along. We must get the woman out of prison, and the only way to do this is to find somebody who will pass himself off as Captain Field, claim her as his wife, and take her out on bail."

Frank asked what likelihood there was of one's lighting upon such a man? Who would have the effrontery to assert that he was Margaret's husband to her face?

"It won't be to her face. It will be done before the magistrates without her being present," said Philip. "All we want is a person who will appear and say that he had deserted Madge to go to Australia, and that, reading of her case in the papers, he had come back repenting, and was ready to give bail for her surrender at the trial. His story will sound natural enough."

"Will it?" rejoined Frank, dubiously.

"It will, because the application will be made by a solicitor not in the secret," continued Forester. "The sham Field will only have to show himself, and let his lawyer do the talking. Nat Riddel will be able to procure us some decently-dressed fellow to play a mere dummy part."

"Yes, some scamp who will be turning up for ever afterwards, like the king in a sharper's pack," said Frank. "Thank you, we're deep enough in the mud already. I for my part don't want to get stuck fast."

"As you please. I shall have to manage without you. But you can't be compromised by this move, and it is partly for your sake that I am taking it. However, if you won't help me, don't blow on me, please."

Frank coloured, for to be accused of "rounding upon a pal" was the worst slight that could be put on him. He clenched his fists and for a moment looked "ugly."

"You know I've always stood by you," grumbled he; "but the fact is—I've not told you yet—I'm engaged to be married to Nelly, and I must consider her as well as myself now. If I am disgraced she will suffer by it, and, in sum, if I see there's going to be any more bother, I'd sooner cut the service and leave the country before the smash comes."

"What I want you to do for me isn't much," said Philip, impatiently. He was standing on the hearthrug close to Frank, and spoke in a whisper. "You know I can't leave Fairdale for the present, Rose would be asking what had happened. You will oblige me if you will run up to London and raise as much money as you can on our joint signatures, and as soon as Riddel can move you would have to act as intermediary in town between him and me, so that no writing need pass between us. Once Madge is out of gaol your part will be over, and the rest will concern me."

"But how shall we be better off when Madge is uncaged? I don't see," remarked Frank, with bad grace.

"Well, I shall have a talk with her then," answered Philip, coldly. "I will offer her five hundred a year to go away and leave me alone. If she refuses, I shall say, 'Very well, since you will have it that you are my wife, come and share my lot such as it is. I have no home to give you, but we will go off to the diggings together if that will suit you,' and I'll be as good as my word. Mr. Graham shall then be told the whole truth, and poor Rose will have to bear it as she can. Poor Rose! Do you think I would wear myself out in these worries if it were not for her sake? You taxed me just now with having drawn you into a mess, Frank; I

want to get you out of the mess. Once I'm gone to the deuce with Madge nobody will throw stones at you, and you can marry and settle at your ease."

Frank was touched, and felt ashamed of himself. He now began to think his friend's plan too magnanimous, if anything. Nevertheless he adduced objections, for he doubted whether the magistrates would let out the prisoner on bail, and he asked how it would be possible to procure respectable sureties? The cost would be tremendous, for one thing. Philip combated all this in his domineering way. He had no time to enter into details, he said, and the plan must be left to his management. For the present money was the essential, and he sat down to Frank's table to sign and endorse a number of sheets of blank paper. These, when countersigned by the dragoon, would have to go for what they could fetch.

"My credit is awfully bad, though," remarked Frank, as he collected the sheets. "Benjudah told me last time that my signature only spoilt good paper."

"Benjudah knows, though, that I am going to marry Miss Graham, and that makes a difference."

"Yes, that does; and I suppose you don't mind about the interest?"

"Any interest. If my marriage comes off I'll pay your ticks and mine—that's agreed upon. If I'm obliged to abscond, well, as I'm up to my ears already, a few thousands more won't signify."

"Not to *you*," Frank might have said, had he reflected that in case his friend absconded he should be responsible for all these bills; but Frank had never been a calculator in money matters. He lent his signature as readily as his double-barrel, and was always proud to hear that it brought down something, even though he had no share in the spoils. Locking up the papers in his desk, he promised a little gloomily to do his best with the Benjudah firm, and inquired when he ought to set out for town. Philip replied that their movements must be regulated by the progress of Nat Riddel's recovery. Upon this they shook hands—not very warmly; and Philip returned to Fairdale. He had as usual enlisted his friend's zeal in his service by the diplomatic process of letting him see but half the aims he had in view, for he had other and deeper designs about Margaret than those just disclosed. Cunning not less than audacity are requisite in those who would find docile instruments for a tortuous policy.

Philip's first care on arriving at Fairdale was to ring for his servant Jasper. The man who answered the summons was an ugly customer to look at—pock-marked, morose, evidently taciturn.

Neither women nor children could have liked him, and it is not every man who would have relished his smileless mien, his curt voice, and the military neatness which made him hate to see a pin out of its place. But he had lived nine years with Colonel Forester, and loved him. Whenever he was called to his master's presence he looked him all over at one glance, as a dog might, to see whether anything had gone wrong with his face or clothes since he had last seen him. He never forgot how the Colonel had helped him out of his great scrape, and taken him back after his imprisonment for desertion, just as if nothing had happened. To show his gratitude he had committed perjury in the witness-box and thought nothing of it. His master had said to him, "You must swear you have never been absent from me these nine years," and he had obeyed, just as he would have knocked a man down if ordered.

There are no servants so blindly devoted as soldiers whose masters have been their officers in the army. Discipline endows the officer with a prestige which neither wages nor kindness can procure for a master in civil life, because in civil life compulsion is wanting, and without it obedience has no mainspring. The military servant dares not be saucy and cannot give warning; if he failed in respect, his master could put him into the guard-room; if he left his situation he would not recover his liberty, but simply return to the worse drudgery of regimental service. It is a favour to be chosen for an officer's servant. The post brings many indulgences, for the sake of which it is worth bearing hard words that would drive an independent civilian out of doors. All officers are not kind masters, but those who are—as Colonel Forester was—get quickly requited for their gentleness. The alacrity and faithfulness which were first bestowed as a duty, gradually become a habit, then a passion, till the man, moulded to his master's ways and subservient to his very infirmities, cleaves to him and works for him like a limb.

Edward Jasper hardly breathed when the Colonel told him with kindly peremptoriness that they must part. He thought at first he was being dismissed because his master mistrusted him; but when he understood that a third party had come between them a deep line indented itself above his brows, and his seamy, white face became bloodshot. The force of the blow was broken to him from hearing that he was to remain in his master's service, though absent from him, and that by and by, perhaps, when present troubles had blown over, he might come back; but this was at best poor compensation to one who had got used to his domesticity like a horse to harness.

"My God, sir; I'd sooner have lost all I have than hear this," he said, with an unsteady voice; "you have been a good master to me—you have."

"It's not my fault, Jasper, nor yours," replied Forester, gently, "though I think you acted rather imprudently in entrusting any of your secrets to such a man as Lord Charles Canterham's servant, Thomas Buckster, of the Grenadiers."

"Tom Buckster, sir; so help me the Lord, if he's been blabbing about me he's done what any man ought to be ashamed to do, for I've always acted the man by him," exclaimed Jasper, in agitation. "I never told Buckster nothing, sir. He was down at Aldershot, seeing a mate of his, when I was brought up for my court-martial, and as ill luck would have it, I passed close by him between my escort. That's how it came about, and Buckster sidled up to me to say, 'Don't be afraid of my telling 'em that you've served in the Grenadiers under another name, Ned.' And when I came out of Millbank, sir, I went to Buckster at Chelsea, where the 4th battalion was lying, and treated him to a bottle of champagne, making him swear that he hadn't breathed a word to man or woman alive, and never would—not even to the young party that he was sweet on."

"He has not kept his oath then," replied the Colonel; "but neither he nor any one else can hurt you if you mind my orders and keep out of the way for a time. You must take these letters and post them in Edinburgh; then I shall probably want you to go to Paris and find Robert Dubois to put him on his guard. Paris is besieged, so you may experience some difficulty in getting in even with a passport."

"Oh, I'll get in somehow, sir—no fear," said Jasper, resolutely.

"Well, we must first make sure that Dubois is in Paris, but you can ascertain that at Chupp's Hotel in Soho Square, where they hold a couriers' club."

"I know it, sir. I've seen Dewboy there before."

"Good, then; but your journey to Paris will only become necessary if Mr. Christy should disbelieve these reports and somehow obtain a clue to Dubois's whereabouts. Your best course for the present—that is, when you return from Scotland—will be to remain in London and await my orders. In case of bad news I will send you money for the trip. But now, how about William Scadding? Have you watched him as I desired you?"

"Yes, sir, I have. I spend my evenings at the 'Chequers,' where he goes after his work, so that he couldn't talk without my hearing it. He has said nothing. It's only that Methodist master

of his that bothers him with his questions and makes him mope. He will be very glad to go out of the country."

"Suppose you were to take him with you?"

"To Scotland, sir?"

"To Scotland first, and then to London, and see him off by an Atlantic steamer with a hundred pounds in his pocket. I should think it would suit him to enjoy a holiday with you, and by that means you could keep an eye on him all the time."

"It's easy done, sir," said Jasper. "I'll pick him up at the 'Chequers' to-night, and his bundle will soon be packed. He is a man who has bent his heart on seeing the world."

"The sooner he vanishes from here the better," replied Forester, who drew out his pocket-book and began counting if he had bank-notes enough to pay Jasper's expenses.

He continued to give a few more instructions, and as he did so Jasper threw a glance round the room. The poignant regrets of a good servant were passing through his mind. He wondered who would keep his master's things tidy, and fall in with his habits? A woman's jealousy against the man who was to fill his place arose in him, and it pierced through the next words he spoke:—"Oh, sir, who will be able to do for you as I did?"

"I suppose I must shift with Jack, the groom, until you can come back," said Forester.

"Jack is handy, sir, but if I had only known I might have trained him a bit. It will be uncomfortable for you at first, I am afraid."

"I know what a good servant I am losing, Jasper," said Forester, kindly. "I would not have parted with you of my own account."

He glanced at Jasper and caught the wistful look of attachment in his eyes. It moved him, for this man's devotion was the payment of a genuine graciousness on the master's part. Not in any spirit of calculation, but from pure compassion, had the Colonel befriended Jasper when the latter had confessed himself to be a former deserter. And for this reason he the more appreciated his gratitude—just as we take a greater pleasure in the flowers we have sown than in those which spring up of spontaneous growth. Abruptly pulling off the watch and chain he was wearing—a watch of great price—Forester put them into his servant's hand. "Take this as a gift from me, Edward," he said; "you will be reminded of how I valued your services."

"Don't, Colonel," was all Jasper could mutter in a broken voice, and two hot tears gushed out and trickled down his cheeks.

For a moment both these strange men were unmanned.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DINNER-PARTY.

THERE was a dinner-party that evening at Fairdale. Sir Wemyss and Nelly were there, and the venerable Marquis of Eastshire with his blue riband and star, and several more county people, including the Armstrongs. When Philip descended to the drawing-room the guests had all assembled and were talking of the Crossbridge accident, which had excited universal horror.

"I hear there was a servant of yours among the sufferers, Forester," said Lord Eastshire, shaking hands.

"A former servant," replied Forester, without blenching. "The poor fellow has had a bad shaking, but nothing worse."

"Was the man in your service latterly?" asked Mr. Graham, who had been rather surprised to hear that Philip had been summoned to Crossbridge.

"Oh no, years ago, and only for a short while. He telegraphed for me because he had no other friends near. It was a miserable sight, all those people crowding and crying near the scene of the accident."

"Yes, there were more than forty people killed or injured," remarked Lord Eastshire. "The police brought me the list this evening, and among the wounded was an unfortunate woman who was only let out of prison yesterday morning."

"I wonder whether that was the same whom I saw cross over to the Union to fetch her child," exclaimed Nelly. "The Union is just opposite the gaol, and yesterday, at the hour when prisoners are discharged, I saw a woman go over and come out with a little boy."

"That must be the same, for this one had a child with her," said Lord Eastshire. "She was taken up for dead at first, but when she recovered consciousness her first request was to see Mr. Christy, the gaol chaplain. That was how they knew she had been in trouble."

"And why did they not send for my cousin?" inquired Nelly, full of sympathy.

"They would have done so, I suppose, but the poor creature only lingered two hours," said the Lord-lieutenant.

Two drops of moisture had pealed on Philip's forehead during this dialogue, but its conclusion reassured him, and he approached

Nelly to offer his congratulations on her engagement with Frank. Nelly had always liked Colonel Forester. His romantic attachment to Rose Graham made him a girl's hero, and there was a refinement in his manners which pleased all women. She blushed and thanked him, but inquired archly whether his congratulations extended to Frank also?

"To him chiefly," smiled Philip. "I went to carry him my good wishes this afternoon. Why is he not here?"

"He was not invited. Rose wanted to have me all by myself to talk the grave subject over. He is to come some other night when we shall dine *en petite comité*. I wished to bring Michael, who had received an invitation, but he would not be 'drawn.'"

"Why not? Does he think it a sin to dine in good company?"

"No, but he has got some provoking notions of prison etiquette," answered Nelly, with a little pout. "I know it is all owing to that Margaret Field. Don't tell Rose; but I have seen that woman," added she, lowering her voice. "What a fury she looks."

"How came you to see her?"

"It was against Michael's wish, he would not have allowed me; but I have made friends with Mrs. Baillie the matron, and she has shown me all her prisoners. I surveyed 'Fifteen,' as they call her, through the peep-hole in the door, and saw her pacing about her cell like a wild thing. I felt glad there was the thickness of an iron-studded door between us, for she has eyes as if she would strangle one."

"Does Mrs. Baillie think her better in health?"

"She thinks her very crazy, of course, and finds her most troublesome. Nobody, she says, was ever so rude to her."

"And what does Michael say?"

"Nothing. He will not let me allude to the subject. There is Miss Keyser, the Governor's daughter, a very nice girl, who comes to tea with me sometimes; she and I both tried the other day to elicit what the woman could say to Michael when he sees her in his daily visits, but he would not answer, and papa told me not to tease him. Mind you don't speak to Rose about this, or it might occasion her pain," concluded Nelly, rising from her seat to give her arm to one of the gentlemen, for dinner had just been announced.

Lord Eastshire took in Rose Graham, and Philip was allotted to Mrs. Armstrong. He was satisfied that Michael had told his uncle and cousin nothing of what had passed between Frank and Margaret, and to all seeming Mrs. Baillie had kept her counsel too as to her knowledge of the prisoner's name. This enabled him to dine in peace. It was by Rose's own wish that Mr. Graham now gave

dinner-parties, for she knew how much society cheered him. She was no longer clumsy in eating. The sense of touch which gets so marvellously developed in blind people, guided her hand to the objects before her, and it was pretty as well as pathetic to see how gracefully sure were her movements. She could lift a glass without spilling a drop of its contents, and without exciting fears of awkwardness in those who watched her. Mrs. Merrewether, her companion, sat beside her to render any little office she might require, but Rose seldom had recourse to her assistance. She conversed in her gentle voice with old Lord Eastshire, who abounded in anecdote and frequently made her smile.

Philip found Mrs. Armstrong rather cold, for this lady was mortified at Nelly Christy having accepted Frank so soon after refusing her son Hugh. She asked whether Philip deemed marriages between cousins desirable things, and became more frigid when Philip, ignorant of Hugh's rejection, opined that these two particular cousins were made for each other. However, it was impossible to remain long angry with Nelly, she looked so happy. After dinner she contrived to make her peace with Mrs. Armstrong in the drawing-room before the gentlemen came in; and even Hugh himself forgave her when, later in the evening, she held out her little hand to him and explained that she and Frank had been almost engaged to each other since they were children.

"My mistake was in not wearing an engaged ring to warn you," said she, drolly, "but then, I wasn't quite sure."

"I thought Mr. Bool was to be the lucky man," remarked Hugh.

"Poor Mr. Bool! He is dreadfully angry with Frank," said Nelly, colouring a little. "Why do you gentlemen quarrel in that way about nothing?"

"I don't call it nothing."

"About very little then. But now I have given you my explanation, are you satisfied, and are we good friends?"

"Firm friends, I trust."

"And you are not sorry—not a bit?"

"Sorrier than ever, but resigned to wishing you every happiness," he answered, not without feeling.

Presently, when tea was brought in, Nelly went to sit down beside Rose, and the two girls were soon deep in a private chat. Philip was talking with Sir Wemyss Christy, who, being in high spirits about his daughter's engagement, was disposed to do good to all mankind in consequence. His project of founding a hospital for the obese had taken serious shape in his mind, and he was collecting facts with a view to prove how inimical is adipose tissue

to longevity. He asked Philip whether he had ever known a fat man live to a green old age. Philip could not remember that he had.

"No more has any one else," observed the Baronet. "Fat men die between sixty and seventy at the furthest, whereas spare, dry fellows like me live to any age. Don't you think that is a serious subject for reflection?"

"It ought to be to a fat man. My cousin, Lord St. Hubert, weighs twenty stone. You must lecture him when he comes here for my marriage."

"Mere lecturing won't do; he ought to be locked up and fed on green vegetables and toast. I have seen him waddling into the House of Lords to vote—a piteous sight!"

"His wife is as thin as thread-paper; if they could divide this uneven stock of fat between them they would make a fair-sized couple."

"If I had my way," said Sir Wemyss, "there should be sanitary inspectors who would stop a corpulent man in the street and say, 'Are you aware that you are committing *felo-de-se*, sir? Have you made provision for leaving your wife and children of a sudden?' As for fat boys, their parents ought to be punished for neglecting their health. I wish you would jot down for me any facts about the fat that may come under your personal observation."

"I will with pleasure," said Forester. "I have noticed so far that they lead merry lives."

"Don't believe such a fallacy, it's mere stuff," exclaimed the Baronet. "How can a man be merry when he can't even pull his own boots off? Prick a fat man with a pin and he gets a festering wound that takes weeks to heal. Boils and gout are his portion, and apoplexy dogs him just like an agrarian Irishman armed with a blunderbuss. Ask your cousin how he would like to have an Irishman constantly at his heels waiting to take a shot at him?"

"I will; the question may interest him," replied Philip.

At this moment Nelly left her seat beside Rose and came rustling over with a flush on her face.

"Oh, Colonel Forester, Rose has been asking me whether I have seen Margaret Field, and I didn't like to tell a story, so it all came out."

"You little gosling, that's what comes of disobeying Michael's orders," said Sir Wemyss.

"But, papa, I couldn't guess. Rose wanted to know how that woman looked, and she says that if I think it would do her good I am to say that Rose bears her no ill-will. How am I to take such a message?"

"It can't be taken, of course," said Philip, who instantly went and sat down near Rose. He chid her gently for letting her mind dwell on painful subjects. This was not the first time she had alluded with pity to Margaret Field, and he always discouraged her doing so. In his present rebuke there was a tone of uneasiness which had struck her before that evening in hearing him talk. It would have been imperceptible to others, but her quick ear noted it, just as her eyes would have perceived the least shade on his countenance had they been able to see.

She thought at first he must be distressed about his servant Johnson, and she questioned him about this man of whom she had never heard before. His answers reassured her. Then she spoke of Michael Christy, who, it seems, declined to officiate at her marriage. Did Philip know why he declined? Was it contrary to rules for a gaol chaplain to officiate outside a prison? Philip supposed it was.

"I hope it is not for any other reason, dear," Rose continued. "I was afraid that he might have taken an interest in that poor woman, and thought us vindictive for putting her in prison."

"How could anybody think you vindictive, my darling? What an idea!"

"I wish she were not in prison," said Rose. "It is a cruel thing to imprison a poor woman who was out of her mind. She ought to be kindly cared for by friends. O, how I wish she could be pardoned without being brought to trial; I dread having to show myself in a court of justice as a witness."

"Don't think on the subject, dear. Perhaps you will not be asked to appear after all."

"They will be obliged to call me, Mr. Armstrong says, and I fear that when I am led into the witness-box my blindness will move people to compassion and raise a prejudice against the prisoner. I am trying to school myself to be firm on that day, I don't want to cry in court. I should like to tell the judge that I was never so happy as now since my blindness, because—because," and Rose pressed her lover's hand to intimate why she was so happy. With exquisite fondness she had clasped both her hands over his and held it some moments.

Loss of sight is the heaviest of calamities, and no blind person ever ceased to mourn the day which closed for him in a perpetual night. But when Christian faith is so strong that nought of the Almighty's chastening is despised, when every act that hurts us is accepted as part of an inscrutable purpose, merciful in its seeming harshness, and fatherly even when love is not to us visible in it,—then a blind person may bear her affliction with the same resignation

as Rose Graham did. She used to say she had much to be thankful for in not having been blinded when she was younger, and had not seen so much of the world. Heaven must have intended to prepare her for her blindness in affording her all those opportunities of travel which had stocked her memory with lovely visions. She consoled herself by reflecting on the faculties that had been left her to alleviate her lot. One day her lover saw her holding a bright flower, and she told him with a smile that she was admiring the colour of it. "There are no flowers so beautiful as those which I see, Philip. They are never pale for want of sun warmth, and there is no autumn to make them wither. I live in an eternal spring." And as to perfumes, to which she was growing very impressionable, she remarked that it was a proof of the kindly dispensation which rules all things on earth, that the flowers of the sweetest smell were the commonest, which require no tending. The rare plants of the tropics which the rich may buy have penetrating odours which all do not enjoy, but the most delicious perfumes belong to the violet, the wall-flower, the May-blossom, and the wild rose, which the poor can have for the picking.

The prattle and the laughter of children too gave her exquisite pleasure. Sometimes, when walking on the turf of the park leaning on Philip's arm, she heard the little rustics clattering to the village school along Fairdale road. She would stop and say playfully, "I am sure some of them are unwashed and terribly ill-combed, but it does not matter; I see them all rosy and nice, like the children in Gainsborough's pictures. There, I hear one quarrelling; I am certain he must be a dark-eyed, chubby urchin, like the *bambini* who roll each other over in the dust of those Italian cities." And she would laugh as gaily as the children themselves.

Music was another of her great solaces, and she so excelled as a singer and pianist that no lover of harmony could hear her without thrilling. She had caught inspiration from the ideal world where her fancies roamed, and composed without knowing it. She had only to let her fingers ramble over the keyboard to evoke melodies of divine tunefulness, which, rippling one after the other, like the waters of a stream, bore the listener through all the emotions of gladness, or undefinable, yet sweet melancholy, which music yields. There are brilliant professionals, who writhe their bodies into contortions and splash notes from their instrument as if they had six hands all working at once; and there are highly-trained singers, whose soulless performance is a thing to be applauded rather than relished; but the voices which men love, and which leave long

echoes behind them, are those of the girl who sings at her work in the hay-field, of the songstress who carols at her window, while plying her needle, of the young mother who has a baby on her lap, and sings for pure joy as she fondles him and hears him crow. And if, again, some wanderer has been rowed over a lake on a summer night, when the air was silent and the stars beamed softly in the dark blue heavens ; and if he has heard from a boat, which glided for a moment near his own, the caressing voice of a girl in love, singing a song which floated away but too soon, he has said to himself that this was the voice to charm him ; and Rose Graham's was one of these. It welled up from her heart like a limpid spring, and not one of its crystal notes but revealed the source whence it came. She liked to sing the old ballads and glees, the quaint romances and touching popular legends, which breathe the spirit of poetry, and appeal to those voiceless instincts of human nature which chorus with them in silence, calling on us to do brave and noble things, to spurn what is mean, to abide by what is true. Philip Forester never listened to her without falling into a kind of trance, in which all that was good in him held a momentary dominion over his appeased spirit, and made him wish that he could always remain in this state, imagining no harm. He wished this now as he admired her shapely features, and felt her balmy breath close to his face. If he could succeed in his designs and marry her, how good he would be to her, how he would atone for the past by leading a life without blame !

Philip Forester is not the first man who has made resolves to be honest—as soon as he could afford it.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DETECTIVE'S REPORT.

It was on a Thursday that Nat Riddel had called on Michael Christy. When five days had passed without bringing any news of him, the chaplain began to wonder. He somewhat exaggerated the difficulties of collecting evidence, and that quieted him ; but Margaret, more impatient, asked eagerly every day whether he brought tidings, and fixed a searching glance on him, as though she suspected him of concealing intelligence he had received. There

was a hard, repelling manner about her. He sought for her full trust, and she would not give it.

Michael found it discouraging to work in this way. Of all the inmates of the gaol, she was the only one whose face did not beam at his approach. He was making friends in all the wards; even Tom Piper was growing tame; but if, after a long conversation, the chaplain succeeded in apparently mollifying "Fifteen," on the morrow she was as icy as ever. Then he had to go over the same ground once again, working his way by patience. The worst of it was that every day he discovered some new charm in Margaret, which made him feel her coldness the more.

At last the letter from Scotland arrived. On the seventh day, after morning chapel, Michael found it on the table of his office. In his anxiety to bring the prisoner hopeful news, he forgot that the letter might brand his brother with infamy, and he muttered a moan of amazement when the sense of its contents became clear to him.

Sinking weakly into a chair, he read again. The letters on the paper seemed to dance. Could it be that he was waking and in his sober senses? The detective's report conveyed a total refutation of Margaret's story. After apologising for not having written before on the ground that he had nothing to say, Nat Riddel described his peregrinations in Scotland. At the "Randolph Hotel" there was no record of the sojourn of Captain and Mrs. Field, nor was there at most of the other hotels on his list. At the "Bell" of Glasgow, however, the landlady remembered such a couple, and produced a photograph of Captain Field which had been left in the bedroom; but this was not Colonel Forester's photograph. The detective enclosed two cartes that Mr. Christy might compare them for himself, and he purposed going from Scotland to London to obtain corroborative evidence from the photographer to whom Captain Field had sat. After that he would repair to the Continent, or send some one there, to investigate the *alibi* which Colonel Forester had set up. The Colonel pretended that in the autumn of 1867 he had been travelling in France with his valet, Jasper. Nat Riddel undertook to ascertain at what French hotels the two had stayed, and should their names be found on the books of those hotels, the *alibi* would obviously hold good. For himself, he already concluded that Margaret Field's story was a jumble of true and false; that she had been betrayed by some one who bore a vague likeness to Colonel Forester, but nothing more. After a great deal of circumstantial explanation, indicating that he had taken great pains in his inquiries, the writer would

up by saying that he would wait on Mr. Christy at Tolminster as soon as he had completed his mission. Meanwhile if Mr. Christy had any further communications to make, would he please address his letters to Mr. Riddel's private address, B— Street, St. Pancras, and *not* to the Inquiry Office. This for greater privacy's sake.

Michael turned the letter over, and sat eyeing it with a stony stare.

It would have needed that his faith in Margaret's narrative should have been built on a basis of ocular evidence to withstand such a shock as this. It was as though a battering-ram had been brought to bear upon a hastily-constructed edifice of lath and plaster. Down fell the structure, walls and all.

How could the chaplain suspect that this long report, with its intentional vulgarisms, had been written by Colonel Forester and posted by Edward Jasper; and that, furthermore, it was this Jasper who would probably be sent abroad to despatch thence messages confirmatory of his master's alleged *alibi*? Michael was not of a suspicious nature, and nothing less than deep astuteness could have opened any man's eyes to such a plot as this. There lay the two photographs of Colonel Forester and Captain Field, telling the story of Margaret's hallucinations with incontrovertible plainness, and the chaplain had no choice but to believe in them.

So Frank had spoken the truth! Somehow Michael's thoughts could not dwell on the grievous wrong he had done his brother and Forester; he could think only of Margaret. What would she say when he disclosed the news he had received, and what would *he* do if she still adhered to her story? The idea of the scene he must have with the prisoner moved him strangely.

He would have liked to take counsel of somebody, but knew not of whom. He could not explain matters to Sir Wemyss without acknowledging that he had suspected Frank, still less could he confide in Nelly. It seemed to him that Mrs. Baillie's sound sense would be of most use to him at this juncture, though it stung him to reflect that the matron had all along hinted her disbelief of the prisoner's defence.

He pressed his forehead against his hands and mused on that verdict which all, save himself, rendered as to Margaret's being insane. Was it possible that a woman who spoke so lucidly, and adhered with such unswerving tenacity to the main line of her story, should be a maniac, forging fancies? And yet if she were accountable for her words she had foully traduced Frank, for, admitting the possibility of her having mistaken Colonel Forester for Captain Field, it was not credible that she should have mistaken

Frank for another man. Conjecture on this head only led the chaplain to the conclusion, suggested by Frank himself, that Margaret must have seen him at Woolwich (perhaps in Scotland too), and that his imposing stature and clear features had impressed themselves on her memory, furnishing materials out of which her brain had afterwards created an imaginary witness of her marriage. And this brought back the theory of insanity. Michael had heard of people being rational on all points save one. He had not believed in the wondrous popular versions of such cases, but a recent deception makes one humble, and he resolved that he could not do better than have recourse to Dr. Hardy's lights.

It was about the doctor's hour for attending at the prison, and Michael crossed over to the surgery with the two photographs in his pocket. His medical colleague was making up pills. Working with a pestle and mortar, he hummed a tune while braying his paste; and between whiles addressed jocular remarks to a prison cat, who sat on the hearth-rug watching his movements. Before Michael had opened his mouth Dr. Hardy said he was glad to see him, for he wished to warn him against one of the male prisoners, who, after twenty months' confinement, had developed symptoms very common to a protracted course of the silent system.

"It's B, 2, 14. Do me the favour of not going near him, Christy. He has got the religious craze."

"What do you call the religious craze?" asked the chaplain.

"Why, you've gone and upset him by telling him that he will go to heaven like the rest of us; his own fancy was for the other place."

"Well, but——?"

"Yes, yes—I know; but there are people who like to take their religion hot. I don't see why you should disturb a man's comfortable belief in his being damned if it serves to keep him quiet."

Dr. Hardy was a privileged joker, and Michael made no comment on his remark.

"I wish to consult you about Margaret Field," he said. "She has told me a number of things which I have investigated and found to be incorrect."

"Ah! you're beginning to see clear, are you? I should think that when a man came across as patent a case of hysteric melancholia as was ever brought into a gaol he would discern it without much investigating. Why she accused your own brother the other day of being in a league to persecute her!"

"She did; still I can hardly credit her being mad."

"Mad is a vague term. All cracked people don't dance on their heads. 'Fifteen' is a nervosobolious subject—been deserted by a

man she liked, and wants to be revenged. She'd blow up six-score men to pay off her grudge on our sex." Dr. Hardy turned out his pill-paste into a sort of curry-comb, which moulded it into flabby strips, and he propounded some of his experiences on insanity. "The deuce is to pay with those hysteric women. They tell lies without rhyme or reason. I knew one in this gaol who complained of having swallowed seven penny-worth of coppers. I went to work with emetics, the stomach-pump, &c., but found nothing. Note that the symptoms of poisoning by copper had been perfectly simulated by the patient, and that she must have suffered a good deal whilst I was ransacking her inside. One day she confessed her lie—they all do that in the end, but choose their own time. This Margaret Field will some day laugh in your face, and come out with some quite new story, but she will wait until her obstinacy has got her ten years penal servitude."

"Ten years! nonsense!" exclaimed Michael, aghast.

"Why you don't suppose the judge will turn the woman loose to persecute Colonel Forester again," retorted the doctor, twiddling a pill between the forefinger and thumb of each hand. "I'll do my best to get her acquitted on the ground of insanity, but she won't gain much by that, for if sent to Broadmoor for life she will be worse off than at Woking. It might be different were she to recover her reason between now and the Assizes, and make an apology in court, throwing herself on the mercy of the prosecution. If she could find sureties for her good behaviour she might be enlarged on recognizances to come up for judgment if called; but she has no friends to go bail for her, or to pay counsel—nothing."

"She will not tell me who her friends are," exclaimed Michael, in agitation; "but can nothing be done for the poor woman, doctor? Is there no way of restoring her reason?"

"Quiet is what she wants, and the less she sees of you the better," answered Dr. Hardy. "I have not interfered with your visits before, Christy, because I don't like meddling with the chaplain, but I know that you hold daily confabs of an hour's length with her, and that can only do her harm, besides being against all rules."

"She brought a very serious charge against my brother, and I felt bound to elucidate it," said Michael. "I was trying to probe the truth."

"Well, yes, but you've got at it now, so make an end of the matter. Don't see the woman except when Mrs. Baillie is standing by. These hysteric subjects are full of caprices, and it might suit her one day to swear you had taken improper liberties with her. How foolish you would look then!"

Michael felt that he looked foolish already, for he coloured deep. He said nothing of what he had meant to say, but went out, leaving the doctor writing a list of the prisoners who were to swallow his pills. Soon afterwards Dr. Hardy walked out of the gaol, and Michael betook himself to the female wing. His frame of mind was not enviable, but he saw the necessity of conforming his conduct in future to the doctor's rules, and of no more holding private interviews with Margaret. It was Mrs. Baillie who admitted him. He entered her parlour and told her everything.

The colour came and went on the matron's face as she listened. An immense load was taken off her mind, for since she had been concealing her knowledge of Margaret's name she had lived on ill terms with herself. If her suspense had lasted much longer she must have ended by telling the chaplain what she knew, for she was not the woman to hold back aught that would benefit a prisoner on her trial. The conclusion to which she jumped now was that since Margaret was proved never to have known Frank Christy, the name of Hawthorne, which the latter had mentioned, could not be the prisoner's. But above all, Mrs. Baillie triumphed in the fact that the chaplain would no more converse with Margaret alone.

When he had finished speaking she took up her keys. "Are you going to see 'Fifteen' now, Mr. Christy?"

"Yes, but come with me, please, Mrs. Baillie, and remain with us."

They walked down the ward together, and the matron opened the cell door. Margaret came out. Mrs. Baillie's attitude, even more than the trouble on Michael's countenance, apprised her that news had come at length, and bad news. Michael said nothing, but silently handed her the photograph of the supposed Captain Field and waited to hear her remarks on it. With an impetuous movement Margaret turned the carte to the light, that came through a grated window, but she at once shook her head and restored it, answering a question that had not been put:—"Who is that? That is not my husband," she said.

The chaplain then gave her the other portrait. This time the prisoner clasped it with both hands.

A slight shiver thrilled over her limbs, and her lips moved in a spasm. She seemed to be about to speak—perhaps words of anger; but before she could give them utterance the sight of her husband's features brought back such a flood of recollections of old days, and such a gush of emotion,—the like of which only women know,—that she tottered forward and leaned against the whitewashed wall, breaking into a paroxysm of sobs.

This sight unmanned the chaplain, for though he had seen Margaret's eyes red, he had never before beheld her crying. Her sudden weakness, and the melting pathos of her gesture as she crouched there, hugging the likeness of the man whom she believed to have wronged her, were too much for him.

He was conscious that something had taken place within him, making him feel for this woman's grief as he could have felt for no other human being's. He wished he might take her hands in his and console her. Her Christian name hovered on his lips, but there stood Mrs. Baillie, cold and observant, and he could only discharge his duty in telling her the gist of the detective's report.

He was astonished afterwards at the cold-blooded way in which he did this; not that he really had been cold-blooded, but the impression which the scene left on his disturbed mind was as though he had struck the poor creature defenceless. He had to hint that he considered her insane, and to exhort her to be calm! Margaret neither answered nor looked at him; only, when he had ended, she raised her eyes with a forlorn expression, as though she understood nothing. But she understood it all.

"May I keep this portrait?" she asked, standing upright and pressing it to her breast, as if she would not yield it unless forced.

Michael nodded, and she thanked him, then walked towards her cell.

"Have you nothing to say, Mrs. Field?" he inquired, as she stood on the threshold, for he could not bear to part in this way.

"Nothing," she replied, half turning her head. "I could not expect that you would befriend me against your brother. But I am not insane." And she went into her cell, closing the door.

No reproaches, no abuse—nothing but this mournful insinuation of distrust. Mrs. Baillie, glancing at the chaplain's face, saw it was livid.

"She made no mistake about those photographs," muttered he; "you see she recognized Forester!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

DESOLATE

THE dinner-bell sounded under the big dome of the prison, and was re-echoed by a smaller one in the female wing. The lifts ascended from the kitchen loaded with tins half full of meat and potatoes. The tread-wheel stopped, the cranks ceased their monotonous purring, and the prisoners returning to their cells, tramped heavily along the slated galleries. In the female washing-room the women, who had been up to their elbows in suds, stepped out of their boxes and wiped their shrivelled hands on their check aprons. At a word of command from the wardress they faced doorwards, and hobbled out in single file, unrolling their sleeves, and carrying a pungent smell of dampness and yellow soap into the ward.

Barby Haggit caught up Margaret's dinner-tray, which a waiter brought from the hotel, and, poising it deftly on her left hand and shoulder, started off to the cell and whisked a key in the lock. She was temporarily entrusted with Mrs. Baillic's key for the purpose, but had orders simply to lay down the tray, and then go out without talking.

She never obeyed this rule of silence, for talking had the sweetness of forbidden fruit, and she had already struck up a friendship with Margaret by scrappy conversations at odd moments. It happened that on this morning she was in spirits, for Margaret, to reward her attendance, had privately presented her with a small pair of gold and turquoise earrings, which the London girl had spent the forenoon in polishing with her sleeve and surreptitiously staring at in corners admiringly. The gift had made her grateful, so that the uncouth heart of "One" sympathized with the sorrows of "Fifteen."

She found Margaret looking very faint, and sitting forward in her arm-chair, with the photograph on her lap, which she had covered with her hands when the door opened.

"Here's your dinner, mem," said "One," in a cheery whisper. "And Lor', it smells so nice."

"I am not hungry, Barby, you need not take the trouble to lay the things," said Margaret.

"Not eat, mem! Why it 'ud be a sin to waste such wittles. Look—soup, roast fowl, and, oh my! a happle tart and custard."

"You may leave the soup, but take away anything else you like."

"And shan't you drink any of the wine, mem?"

"No, you may take the wine too."

"You aint a frettin', are you?" asked Barby, eyeing her more narrowly. "Don't do that, it aint any use. Why, look at me. During two months afore my trial I thought they was going to scrag me, and I used to dream o' nights of a beast of a man tying a rope round my neck. Lor', it gave me the shivers, so that I couldn't abide being in the dark."

"I hope you will never know such sorrow as mine," sighed Margaret, and with a look so wretched that Barby was chilled.

The girl had no time to waste, though, for Mrs. Baillie would be downstairs in a minute from distributing the dinners in the upper ward. Lifting the decanter to her mouth she tossed back her head, knowing by experience that the close contact of a bottle's nozzle with a drinker's lips creates a vacuum of air and checks the flow of liquor. In a trice half-a-pint of sherry had gurgled down her throat, fetching a bright glow on her cheeks. "My! how good it is, it warms yer," she panted; but, mindful of Tom Piper, she emptied the other half-pint into a small black bottle which she had filched from the matron's cupboard, and kept secreted in her pocket ready for thrusting among the ropes the next time she should go to the oakum-room.

The piece of fowl and tart remained to be disposed of, and Barby wrapped them in her pocket-handkerchief, which she concealed in the bosom of her dress. This done, she swallowed the custard from the glass, not being able to carry it out with her. The feat made her giggle.

"Now, Mem, I'll just mess the knife and fork in the plates, so that missus mayn't think I've ate the things, else I'd get a wiggling," said she, and suiting the action to the word, she dug the knife and fork among some Brussels sprouts, and stuck the spoon in the empty tart-dish. Stealthy as a wild fowl, she next crept to the door and listened. The clatter of tins upstairs had ceased, and the matron was coming down, so, turning round with a nod and smile, Barby went out and locked the door softly.

When Miss Mac Craik came in later to remove the tray and saw the empty dishes and decanter, she concluded that "Fifteen" had an excellent appetite, and made a report to that effect to Mrs. Baillie. But Margaret touched nothing till tea-time, and remained in a feverish ecstasy, taking little account of the passing hours. For the first time since she was in the prison she refused to go out into the airing-yard at her hour for exercise.

She passed a woful night. So long as there was light in her cell

she could look on her husband's portrait, and the reminiscences it brought—some most tender—were enough to keep her from dwelling on present troubles. During that day she lived in dreamland; but when she was in bed, in the dark, the horror of her friendless position overwhelmed her. All the fancies that had rocked her thoughts for hours took flight, and her mind, recovering its balance, gazed with consternation at a prospect without issue.

The clouds of night passed by the grated window, and made a patch of grey for her eyes to rest on. In one of the neighbouring cells a drunken woman admitted in the evening was yelling evil songs. By and by this person smashed her mug, and became so obstreperous that the matron had to summon the night warders to help her convey the jade to a padded cell. This led to a riotous scene of howls, resistance, and blasphemies, and Margaret had to picture to herself the half-naked woman fighting with three men, and being carried in their arms, by main force, along the ward, and thence out of hearing.

Sitting up with her hands clasped in anguish, her ears dinning by this disgusting shindy, the forlorn prisoner had a thought which induced a fit of crying. She fancied that if Philip Forester saw her in this plight he would pity her.

Why had he deserted her? Why had he belied the tender vows he had made her of his own free will? It crossed her brain that Philip must owe money to these Christys, and that they were forcing him into a rich marriage so that they might get paid. Whether Michael was now an accomplice in his brother's schemes, or had been deluded by him, Margaret any how attributed her new misadventure to Frank Christy, not to her husband. Philip Forester had never grieved her with an unkind word, and why should he have forsaken her unless he had been compelled to it? Then she examined herself as to whether she had been unkind to him or tiresome, and ended by blaming herself for having been violent, and having caught up the tongs in the blacksmith's forge to protect herself against his attempt to destroy her marriage certificate. She ought to have let him wrest it from her; perhaps if she had cried, instead of being so hard and threatening, his compassion would have been stirred. Every time Margaret recalled that scene in the forge she inwardly blessed the providence that had averted the blow from Philip's eyes. She was sorry for Miss Graham, but, for the life of her, could not help being thankful that her husband had not been blinded by her act.

In the morning the prisoner was so worn out by crying that she could not touch the tea which Barby brought in; it choked her.

She lay in bed dozing fitfully, and wishing every time she woke that the sun would shine. The noise of women swabbing the upper gallery with wet cloths only allowed her to slumber in snatches. At midday Dr. Hardy came and felt her pulse. Hearing about the photograph, he said the chaplain must have been out of his mind to excite the woman in that way, and ordered that the "trumpery" should be taken away while the prisoner slept. Margaret swallowed an opiate which he prescribed, and soon after fell into a sleep of exhaustion. Then Mrs. Baillie, who had taken the precaution of not double-locking the door, crept in with inaudible steps and found the portrait clasped with the face inwards on the prisoner's breast. But the fingers were relaxed by slumber, and surrendered their treasure more easily than they would have done waking.

The doctor had said that the prisoner would recover calm in sleep; these optimist prognostications were, however, defeated in the afternoon, when Margaret awoke and found that her portrait had been abstracted. In a paroxysm of fury she rang her bell and asked who had dared to commit the theft? The matron made matters worse by pretending she did not understand what was meant, and denying flatly that "Fifteen" had ever possessed a photograph. "It's one of your delusions, 'Fifteen,'" said she. When a patient is suspected of insanity people think they may tell her, or him, falsehoods with impunity, which is just as if because a man carried his arm in a sling everybody were to claim the faculty of sticking pins into it. Margaret was standing in her nightdress, and barefooted, on the cold floor of the cell. She had already caught a chill from searching for her photograph in every corner for nearly half-an-hour, under the impression that it had dropped out of her bed. Her teeth chattered as she listened to the matron, and when she saw what a barefaced attempt was being made to play upon her credulity, the effort to keep her indignation under command curdled the blood at her heart, and brought on a nervous attack. She fell down in convulsions, her lips blanched and her hands clenched.

In great alarm Mrs. Baillie sent off a warder to Dr. Hardy's private residence in the town, and when the doctor arrived he found the prisoner in sickly condition. She had been restored to a sort of animation by salts and vinegar chafings, but was crying on her pillow feebly as a child.

The doctor did not order the photograph to be restored, but caused the patient to be at once removed to the infirmary.

"Confound those parsons," he grumbled. "Hang 'em, with their ill-timed zeal. A man isn't fit to hold a chaplaincy until he's sixty."

Mrs. Baillie summoned Miss Mac Craik and "One" to lend a

hand, and between them Margaret was carried wrapped up in blankets, the matron leading the way with her keys. Dr. Hardy walked behind exhaling his sentiments till they came to the infirmary, where he complained of a smell of damp.

"Don't you ever light a fire up here, Mrs. Baillie?"

"The place has not been used for six months, not since the confinement in Room 3," answered the matron.

"Ah, yes, that barge-girl who had twins. But you should light fires once a week at least in the wet season, whether the rooms have tenants or not. 'One,' you'll run down presently to fetch fuel for Room 2, and be quick about it, there's a good girl."

"Yessir," said "One."

"Shall I have 'Fifteen's' things brought up from her cell?" inquired Mrs. Baillie, throwing open Number 2 door.

"Yes, have everything brought up," said the doctor; "this place is more cheerful. Keep up a good fire, let the patient have her books and papers, and anything she may ask for in reason, but no chaplain's visits. I cut off her spiritual meat and drink entirely. If she becomes unmanageable," added he, rubbing his ear, "we must transfer her to the county asylum."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NAME OF HAWTHORNE.

To reach the infirmary the party had to cross a flying iron bridge which connected the block of the prison with the right-hand tower, flanking the façade in the entrance-yard. This tower was reserved for women, its companion on the other side being the men's infirmary. It comprised half-a-dozen white-washed rooms, three of which on the topmost floor were set apart for infectious cases. All these chambers were spacious and scrupulously clean. Each had a good-sized iron bedstead painted light-blue, and a fire-place. At the head of every bed was a brass bell-knob, communicating with the wardress's room in the prison, so that a patient who wanted anything could summon an attendant without difficulty. In serious illnesses two prisoners would be told off to attend the patient, turn by turn, day and night.

The cheerfulness of the infirmary consisted in the magnificent

an odd gentleman, some might think him, with his theeing and thouing, but he's right enough when it comes to doing a good turn."

"Does Mr. Hawthorne live here?"

"No, not exactly; but he's been staying with his daughter while Dr. Tabor was away in France, looking after the wounded in the war. I believe the doctor is going off to France again soon, for there's not much practice for him in these parts."

The publican pointed across a strip of patchy common, where a few geese were browsing, and showed the way to Ivy Lane. Somebody called him indoors, and he locked the skittle-alley without noticing how flushed his interlocutrix had become, and how she trembled. Mrs. Baillie crossed the common with quick steps, agitated by a presentiment which made her heart numb. This day seemed to be one when surprises pour. Entering the lane she passed through a group of people loitering outside a barn, where the coroner's inquest was taking place; and further on reached another group, who were staring at Dr. Tabor's gabled and ivy-covered residence. Pushing open the gate of the front garden the matron received a shock at seeing Colonel Forester conversing on the lawn with a tall, dark man, ashy pale, who was leaning on a stick, and had evidently but just recovered from illness. A meeting with the Colonel under such circumstances was almost a revelation. Mrs. Baillie forgot having heard that a servant of his was among the injured, and connected his presence immediately with Mr. Hawthorne.

She had never spoken to the Colonel, but knew him from having seen him in the magistrates' court during Margaret's examination, and she thought he recognised her, for, standing aside to let her go by, he lifted his hat. But this was only his courtesy towards a lady whose features he vaguely remembered to have seen without recollecting where. He went on talking with his companion, and bethought him that this sedate person who eyed him so curiously must be somebody connected with Crossbridge. Now it would mightily have startled the inspector of police, who was taking notes in the doctor's drawing-room, if it had been suggested that the burglars about whom he was teasing his mind were none other than this gallant Colonel and the pallid Mr. Johnson, who had hobbled out of doors that morning for the first time since his accident.

Nobody was much surprised that a burglary should have been perpetrated at Crossbridge, for since the accident the place had been infested by all the bad characters for twenty miles round, but there were some peculiar circumstances attending this outrage on the doctor's property. The burglars had purloined nothing beside the picture, except a few chimney ornaments which had been recovered

in an adjoining field along with the picture-frame. The picture itself, "a thing of no value to any but the owner," was the only article now missing, and the inspector's theory was that the burglars must have been alarmed while ransacking by the opening of Mr. Vigus's window.

Peter Vigus had been compelled to state what he had seen and heard of the figure in the garden and the steps on the stairs, and this of course drew suspicions on the housemaid, Ruth. There was no possibility of suspecting any one else. Mr. Johnson was above suspicion, and could have obtained an unimpeachable character from Colonel Forester, if needful. Ruth Hay, on the other hand, was a pert, good-looking baggage, who had lately revealed herself in a bad light by flirting with the rustic ne'er-do-well already mentioned—a fellow who played skittles, betted on races, and was believed to poach. Her mistress had cautioned her against this intimacy, and the girl had told a fib, saying she would give up her sweetheart; but cross-questioning forced from her the confession that she had had a stolen interview of ten minutes' length with the good-for-nought on the previous evening towards supper-time, and in the garden. The inspector's countenance looked like an indictment a foot long as he heard this avowal, but Dr. Tabor threw out a chance to the girl by suggesting that she might have conversed with her lover through the parlour window when the household were in bed, and that, having forgotten to bolt the sash and close the shutters when she retired, she had thoughtlessly left an opportunity of which her lover, or somebody else, had taken advantage, for there was nothing to prove that the burglary had taken place at the actual time when Mr. Vigus had heard the steps on the stairs. Dr. Tabor was not one of those men who are anxious to advertise themselves by prosecuting a servant "on public grounds," but he liked to be sure as to the trustworthiness of those about him, and Ruth's stubborn rejection of the explanation he furnished made him wroth. He told the girl that there was no harm in forgetting to lock a shutter, nor even in holding clandestine interviews with a man who meant honestly by her, but it was a piece of folly to persevere in an untruth which would hamper every one concerned in investigating a crime. Ruth only wrung her hands, sobbed, and protested that she couldn't swear to things "that wasn't." She had bolted sash and shutters, had gone to bed at ten, and not left her room till morning.

At the moment when Mrs. Baillie arrived at the house, the conviction had forced itself upon everybody that the girl was one of those hussies who will bite their tongues off sooner than retract

a lie. It was the nursemaid who answered the matron's ring and took in her card with a few words in pencil on it to the doctor. The latter passed it with a significant glance to the inspector, who forthwith caught at the hint for employing the prison matron's opportune presence to terrorize poor Ruth. Such processes of moral torture are not lawful, but they are pretty frequent in fireside tribunals. The doctor and the inspector repaired to the dining-room, where the matron was seated far from the fire, but with a burning spot on each cheek. After preliminary civilities they gave her an outline of the case, and requested that she would oblige them by kindly playing a little rôle of salutary intimidation.

She consented, but remarked that Colonel Forester would prove a good auxiliary. She wanted to see this man close, to hear his voice. After what she had heard it was impossible that she could let the mystery that confronted her remain unsolved. It was as though she had a bandage over one eye. However, what she told Dr. Tabor was that the Colonel would probably be useful from his experience in dealing with prisoners on court-martial.

So the doctor walked out to prefer his request to the Colonel, but not without shyness, for he scrupled to trouble so brilliant a gentleman about a petty burglary. Mrs. Baillie moved to the window and looked out into the garden, where Forester and the pale man were still talking. Hatred has intuitions almost miraculous, and in her detestation of Margaret, Mrs. Baillie suddenly guessed the whole of Forester's secret—knew that she must be under the same roof as Margaret's father, that the stolen portrait was Margaret's, and that the thief must be Margaret's husband. She saw the doctor accost Forester, and the latter start, then turn and accompany Dr. Tabor into the house, followed by the invalid. But here another revelation broke upon the matron, for, upon a second view, she remembered having seen that pale man's face before. Passing through the prison-yard ten days ago, she had met him coming out from the chaplain's room, and surely it must have been on the very day when, by Mr. Christy's account, the detective had called to receive his instructions. Could this man be the detective? If so, what was he doing with Colonel Forester? But at this point the matron's surmises were lost in clouds.

As for the Colonel, the intimation that the lady whom he had just seen was the matron of Tolminster gaol operated upon him as the abrupt unmasking of a battery. But for the fact that a man cannot crowd many thoughts into a minute's time while somebody else is speaking to him, he would have felt like one in a forlorn hope. As it was, he and Nat Riddel exchanged affrighted glances

while preceding Dr. Tabor into the house. In another moment they were both ushered into the drawing-room, where all the household were assembled. Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne were there, Violet Tabor, and Mr. Vigus, and the inspector came in with Mrs. Baillie.

The matron purposely avoided the Colonel's eyes, and with a fluttering heart riveted her gaze on Margaret's parents and sister. In Mr. Hawthorne she could discern nothing to prove the relationship she sought, but it was different with Mrs. Hawthorne and Mrs. Tabor. Though Violet's mouth and chin were rounded into the fuller proportions of matronhood, and though her happier life as a wife and mother had embellished her face with a serenity not to be found in the grief-tormented visage of Margaret, yet her eyes and Margaret's were alike, and so were certain inflexions of her voice. Mrs. Hawthorne again had Violet's clear glance, and a little of the composed sadness that could be observed in Margaret during the latter's tranquil hours. Mrs. Baillie marked these signs and thrilled.

Meanwhile the inspector—a stiff man, with a broken voice and cuperosed cheeks—had laid a hand on the luckless Ruth's shoulder, and was shaking her.

"Now then, young 'ooman, are you going to speak the truth! Here's the matron of Tolminster gaol come to take you to pris'n."

"Nay," said Mr. Hawthorne, who objected to falsehoods even in jest. "Nay, Ruth, we shall not send thee to prison, but this matron hath knowledge of the speech and manners of the deceitful, and perchance she will read in thine eyes whether thou sayest truly."

"Look up, if you please," said Mrs. Baillie.

"Oh, mum, what can I say?" sobbed the girl, with her apron to her eyes. "I barred those dratted shutters as tight as could be, and, oh my, I was never used so shameful before, never!"

"I am afraid Ruth has made up her mind to grieve us all," remarked Mrs. Tabor, who was ruefully holding the frame of the stolen picture.

Mr. Vigus intervened, bidding Ruth take it easy and collect her thoughts, but he was in semi-disgrace from not having raised an alarm when he heard the night noises, and the inspector snubbed him.

"You acted wrong, Mr. Vigus, sir—should never hear noises after dark without acting as a watch-dawg does."

"Mr. Vigus meant kindly by the girl, and that ought to induce her to be truthful," said Mrs. Tabor. "I think too that she might have a regard for Colonel Forester's many kindnesses."

This was an allusion to divers vails which had graced the Colonel's visits.

"I rather take the girl's part," interposed Forester, quietly. "I have known burglars secrete themselves in cellars during the day, and arrange so that suspicions should fall upon servants."

"But don't you think, sir, that in that case they would have begun by breaking open the plate cupboard?" submitted the inspector, respectfully.

"Something may have upset their plans," answered Forester, "but I form my opinions from Ruth's manner. I think Mrs. Baillie will agree with me that there is accent of an evident sincerity here."

"I think so too," concurred Mrs. Baillie, drily.

"Colonel Forester's opinion must settle the question," amiably observed Mrs. Tabor, who signed to her husband to terminate the discussion.

"Well," said the doctor, giving in with a smile, "it's a mysterious matter, and of course I never suspected Ruth of actual dishonesty; but if she wants to keep her situation, she ought——"

"You don't think I mean to stay in your house another day—not a hour!" interrupted the girl, shaking herself free of the policeman, and becoming fractious now that she saw her course was won. "O lor! to be called a thief for fifteen pounds a year and no beer money!"

"Don't you be saucy, young woman," frowned the inspector, sorry to see his prey slip.

"And don't you be so forward before your betters, *you*," snapped Ruth, turning round as if she would bite him. Having said which, she flounced out, banging the door with a violence which made the panes rattle.

"Treat it as a joke," remarked Mr. Vigus, anxious to restore pleasantness all round.

Nat Riddel had said nothing during the conversation, but he joined in the rather forced laugh occasioned by the girl's exit. It was evident that the matter could not rest here, but it was at an end so far as the Colonel and Mrs. Baillie were concerned, and there was apparently no intention of giving Ruth into custody. The inspector left the room with Nat Riddel, and Forester approached Mrs. Tabor and her mother to thank them for the care that had been bestowed on his "servant," who, said he, was now convalescent enough to return to London. Mrs. Baillie, hearing him, marvelled at his *sang froid*, and began talking with Dr. Tabor and Mr. Hawthorne about the stolen picture, whose loss both deplored sadly. She gathered that Margaret was supposed to be in America. The Quaker alluded to her as "my beloved daughter Sybil," but threw

out no hint of elopement or estrangement. When Mrs. Baillie turned, her eyes fell on Forester with a glance sharp and cold as a dissecting knife, but it did not make him wince. He had drawn out his watch.

"If we are both going back to Tolminster by the mid-day train, Mrs. Baillie, it is time we should be starting," he said, politely.

"I think it is," she answered, accepting his tacit invitation to accompany him, but quaking inwardly with apprehension as to what might come of it.

"I suppose you know that there is no station at Crossbridge, and Blackbridge junction is nearly two miles off," observed Dr. Tabor. "Had I not better have a fly fetched for you?"

"We have three-quarters of an hour to spare," replied the Colonel; "but if Mrs. Baillie objects to walking——"

"No, I would prefer to walk," said the matron; and upon this they took their leave and left Ivy House together.

They crossed the common without exchanging a word. Beyond the "Spotted Dog," whose sign-board, representing a piebald hound, creaked in the wind,—beyond the village church with its weedy grave-yard and moss-grown lych-gate, and beyond the railway viaduct, which had been broken by the collision, but was now repaired,—lay their road to Blackbridge. An east wind whistled keenly, and the matron bent her head to make way against it. In the oaks along the hedgerows rooks were perched, puffing out their feathers in a melancholy way, as is the custom of these birds when the bleak air keeps the worms underground. Wood-pigeons, too, nestled snug within the knot-holes of trees, while the missel-thrush, more hardy, was pecking for his food among dead leaves. In the fields labourers were busy with their bytels and iron wedges splitting the tough elm-butts and logs for firewood.

Mrs. Baillie's pulses throbbed as she wondered what her companion was going to say. He himself was at no loss. A judge of feminine character, he knew that everything can be done with women by appealing to their generosity—nothing by clumsy concealment. Since the matron had not sought to entrap or expose him before witnesses, she at least bore him no animus.

"Mrs. Baillie," he began, when they were out of the reach of human ear, and then paused, as if altering what he had first meant to say, "I do not think that poor girl was in any way connected with the—burglary."

"Neither do I," replied the matron, pointedly.

"It looked to me as if you had some suspicions?"

"Suspensions count for nothing, but they are sometimes very painful to those who harbour them."

"Is it so with you?"

"It is."

"What pains you?"

"The doubt as to how I ought to act, Colonel Forester," she said firmly. "My own judgment is not enough to guide me in this dilemma. I wish I had never learned what has been forced upon me to-day."

"Mrs. Baillie, if you take advice of Mr. Christy, I am lost," said Philip, stopping in the road.

She stopped too, half fascinated by the appealing look he fixed on her, but she pitied him at the same time.

"Why have you placed yourself in this position, Colonel Forester?" she faltered. "Is Margaret Field really your wife?"

"No, by Heaven she is not! but I am bent on saving her from the consequences of her jealous fury, and if you hold secret what I am going to tell you, in a fortnight she will be out of prison and free."

"Free! How? You forget that she is committed to the assizes. Consider my duties. If I stand by and see her convicted knowing what I do, and if my complicity afterwards transpires, what will the world think? What will Mr. Christy say? What peace shall I have from my own conscience?"

"I shall not expose you to any trouble," said Forester, in a hoarse voice; "but first answer me one question. Has Margaret shown any disposition to correspond with her relatives?"

"None; and I wonder at it now, seeing what homely people they are. I imagined them to be proud people who had cast her off. What a dauntless spirit she must have to forego the protection they would bring her! I say it, who till now, never felt for her."

"She was always stubborn as an unbroken colt," said Forester, moodily; "but I don't wish to speak ill of her, much as she has wronged me. There are things that passed between us which you could never suspect, Mrs. Baillie."

"I can sympathize with what you must have had to endure from her overbearing temper," said the matron, duped by his playing the part of victim.

"It is her own fault if I did not marry her," continued Forester, with a feigned sigh, "but persecuting fondness and peevish upbraidings are not what one expects from a wife. Her fretfulness would have worn me out. It was against my wish that she eloped

from her home, and she deserted me because it was absolutely out of my power to marry her publicly as she desired."

"Was it she then who deserted you?"

"Of course it was, though she well knew my position. I had debts; if I had married, my creditors would have swooped down on me and I should have lost my commission. I was obliged to assume a false name in travelling about with her, lest my relations should suspect I was married. However, she was aware of my real name, and I would have overlooked her defects of temper and married her if she would have consented to a private wedding. But no; she wanted to sail into society on my arm, to be presented everywhere, to have a house and give parties, just as if we had ten thousand a year. I did my best for her when she left me—God knows! I gave her three hundred pounds which I could ill afford, and I thought I was quit of her when three years passed without her informing me of her whereabouts. What sort of a life did she lead alone in London during those three years? I have not inquired. Enough that, when she heard I was about to be married to Miss Graham, she sought me out and wreaked her vengeance by trying to disfigure the girl whom I loved. And now that Miss Graham is blind, and has only me to rely on for her happiness, am I to let her life and mine be shattered by this woman who has neither my affection nor regard? I leave you to judge, *you*, who are a good and true woman."

"Your position is certainly very trying," murmured Mrs. Baillie, whose bosom heaved, for she was carried away by the perfidious narrative. "But what do you want me to do for you? You must explain before I can see whether it is possible for me to help you with safety."

"Listen to me then," said Forester, in a voice of earnest appeal, "and you will judge whether I am the sort of man Margaret pretends,—whether, in fact, I am not doing far more than she deserves."

They resumed their walk, and Philip Forester unfolded as much of his plans as he thought needful. In doing so he fooled his listener to the top of her bent. There is no freemasonry among women that leads them instinctively to side with their sex in its quarrels with men. On the contrary, they make allowance for the men, when the latter tell their own tales in sober sadness without flippancy. Further, it was repugnant to the gaol matron to look upon her fractious prisoner "Fifteen" as having lawful claims as a wife upon the high-bred Colonel Forester; she much preferred regarding her as a cast-off concubine, for in this way her own past

conduct towards the prisoner became justified. If Margaret was not an adventuress she was a kind of martyr whom the matron must begin to treat with a remorseful kindness thenceforth. Her pride jibbed at the notion.

Add to this that Colonel Forester talked of allowing Margaret five hundred pounds a year if she would let him alone, which was a grandly generous sum in the eyes of a matron whose salary was £100; and then, to crown all, there was in the project for releasing Margaret a dash of the adventurousness which women love, fraught with danger. Not that Mrs. Baillie was solicited to share the danger, for her own part in the plot was only to keep silent; but heroism is a question of degree, and it seems heroic to a woman to hold her tongue.

So they came in sight of the Blackbridge station, with its white signal posts, and line of empty trucks on a siding; and Philip Forester paused under the branches of a road-side oak, where a brook babbled in a ditch. The walk, the animation of her companion's recital, had lent a glow to the matron's features, and she looked a comely woman as she stood, with heaving breast, to hear the final appeal made to her feelings. Forester himself, who had been simple and earnest throughout his narrative, was handsome enough to have won his cause against a much more callous hearer.

"I have told you all, and now I leave my fate in your hands, Mrs. Baillie," he said. "If you think that one error in my life merits penalties harsher than those that have yet fallen upon it, I shall bow to your verdict, conscious that in having failed to convince *you* I must have deserved to forfeit the good opinion of all other upright women."

"Who am I that I should judge you, Colonel Forester?" answered Mrs. Baillie, with emotion. "It is not much that you are asking of me—only to keep silent."

"To be silent that good may come of it, and past mischief be undone as far as possible."

"I will say nothing. I promise; and I would that I could do more for you. But I wish you well."

"God bless you, then," he said, taking her hand and grasping it. "Thank you for my poor blind bride as much as for myself."

What woman would not have been touched by the grateful fervour which he threw into these words?

CHAPTER XXX.

MICHAEL AT FAIRDALE.

WHEN Philip returned to Fairdale some good news awaited him. Michael Christy had come there with his brother, Sir Wemyss, and Nelly; they had lunched, and Rose was delighted with the chaplain, who had had a long hour's talk with her. As this visit could only be construed in a message of peace Philip was well pleased too, especially on hearing that Michael was still in the grounds, having tarried on purpose to be introduced to him.

"Papa is showing them over the park," said Rose, when her lover had kissed her, "and you had better go out and join them while Nelly and I discuss millinery. I am going to try on a dress."

She meant her bridal-dress, for the preparations for the wedding were advancing. Philip repaired to the park, but as it was a large place he had to stroll about for a while before he fell in with those whom he sought. They were inspecting some improvements in one of Mr. Graham's model farms.

Mr. Graham had formerly been very proud of Fairdale, in the days when Rose could see its beauties; and well he might be, for that any spot in Eastshire should deserve the name of Fairdale reflected credit on its owners. In Devon or Derbyshire a man buys a Glen-Lyn or a Stonnis, leaves the natural scenery untouched, and has a paradise; but in Eastshire the land is as flat as a billiard-table, the hills are as round as puddings, and the trees like a beard of four days' growth. There are some fine estates there, but four or five generations have worked hard to produce them.

Fairdale had been laid out by a retired ambassador. An eminent Italian architect furnished the ground plan; but the noble owner's Highland estate would not pay its expenses and those of Fairdale too, so the palace for which he had contracted was finished, while the grounds for which fortunately he had not contracted were left untouched.

This lodge in a vast wilderness came to the founder's nephew, an admiral, who had seen all countries, and knew their capacities. He, with great good sense, planted exactly what the soil and climate would bear. The swamp where a brook rose blazed with gladiolus, iris, striped maize, and flowering rush. A grove of oak, crab, holly, and mountain-ash bordered the narrow stream for a

short distance; and then the luxury of a lake was obtained by damming up the brook, which at the same time was fed with seams and lodes, as the Eastshire drains are called. Willows, aspens, and alders hid these unsightly but useful seams; and the half-mile of barely perceptible slope from the house down to the lake was planted with wych-elms in groups of four. Boxes, and yews, and sweet-scented shrubs made a court round the house.

The admiral's boy went to sea, but there was no war. He came back in middle life a successful merchant. His park, just arrived at the age of angles and elbows, was too ugly to live in; but his money was laid out upon it under the direction of an able steward. This agent ploughed up all the land behind the swamp and the grove, filled the park with shaggy Dutch cattle, and built a mill below the weir of the lake. The next owner stayed at home, and by dint of hard work made the place profitable; but he was obliged to give up all his time to it, and not merely the two hours weekly which entitle a gentleman to call himself a farmer. After fifteen years, during which he had spent scarcely fifteen weeks abroad, he saw his land produce a first-prize ram and the second-best sample of barley.

It was the fifth owner, Mr. Graham's father, who found leisure to think of pheasants and grapes; but he was a manufacturer who had inherited the place from a cousin when well on in middle age, and upon finding himself master of so fine a demesne, the migratory tastes of his family returned to him, and he began to travel. So true is it, that the more fit a person's house is to live in, the less he lives in it! How often a poor man, looking over an empty house, says to himself, "If I had a place like this, wouldn't I live in it?"

Mr. Graham travelled too, but six months a year at least were spent on his estate, and what a thing of beauty he had made it! A mile long avenue of elms and oaks formed the approach to it on the south side, and all these trees, which had now grown to a towering height, looked taller still by contrast with the little fancy heifers who grazed beneath them. Crossing the vestibule with its porphyry floor and antlered trophies on the walls, you found a long suite of rooms facing to the sunny side, and looking out on to a marble terrace, below which lay a garden full of flower-beds, plats of grass adorned with statues, and fountains, whose waters plashed into basins stocked with carp, some of which were more than a century old. Beyond the garden the lake with moor-fowl, which attracted rats, and these in their turn attracted boys; then the mill, just heard above the splash of a cascade, which tumbled in foaming masses down a precipice of rocks; and across the lake a hundred

acres of woodland teeming with game. To the right was a Druid's grove with kingfishers, and some said with lovers haunting it; behind it the well-tilled acres of roots for winter feed; the gay swamp alive with butterflies, and by it the kitchen-garden with a dozen ornamental cottages for servants and labourers. Skirting this garden ran Fairdale road, leading to the village with the forge, the church, the green decked with a May-pole, and the old almoner's barns of a ruined abbey turned into a parsonage. Standing here on a summer day, one got the best view of the south front of Fairdale Hall, embowered in magnolia, vine, and purple wistaria, with one broad cedar at the corner. Above a little mellow red brick, a parapet of open brickwork, hiding the low leaden roof, a group of chimneys leaning and twisting like sweeps performing a May-day dance; and the pale, clear sky seeming to reflect the mile of chalk soil in which Fairdale was an oasis reclaimed by centuries of peace and industry. The law of entail may have its faults, but without it Fairdale would have remained as bare as the ship's deck of its second founder.

"So you see what patience can do," remarked Mr. Graham with a faint smile to Michael, as they left the model farm and walked into Fairdale road. "The estate has taken long to form, and it will require care to keep up. It is a comfort to me to think it will fall into such good hands as Forester's."

"Colonel Forester understands the management of an estate, I suppose," answered Michael.

"He has not turned his attention much to the subject as yet, but he will soon learn. What I like in him is the intense energy he brings to bear on any object to which he directs his mind."

"A great gift that is."

"One which you possess, too, I think, Mr. Christy. I hear you are doing good work in Tolminster gaol, and as it is work of your own choosing I trust it will bring as great comfort to you as it must do to others."

"Thank you," said Michael. "If anything could fortify me for daily tasks, which often bring their pangs, it would be what I have witnessed to-day in the sight of your daughter's admirable resignation. Mr. Graham—and may I add in yours?"

"You touch a tender chord there," answered Mr. Graham in a grateful tone. "I cannot affect to be insensible to anything that is said in praise of my poor child, whose goodness humbles me, though I have seen it grow up under my eyes to its present fruition."

"Under God yours was the hand that planted it, so it ought not to surprise you. Yes; when I see so much godly strength in one so

young I am led to think of the father who trained that young mind, and I cannot sufficiently express what I feel. Yours was fatherly love indeed !”

“There was no merit in loving Rose,” said Mr. Graham, with a sigh.

He and Michael were walking a little ahead of Sir Wemyss and Frank, who were deep in some topic of their own. A liver-coloured spaniel trotted by Mr. Graham's side, and his hand listlessly stroked it. He did everything listlessly now when he was not with his daughter, and in his wide-awake and grey tweed suit he looked quite a shrunken old man, though six months before he had trod these fields with as elastic a tread as a man of forty. Mr. Graham's was one of those delicate organizations that are not fitted to endure pain : they support it with an outward stoicism, but it preys upon their vitals, bringing on a subtle, rapid deterioration perceptible to all eyes save their own. Mr. Graham's acquaintances remarked that he had had no middle age, having passed at one change from fresh manhood to the decrepitude of white hair and halting steps. He could talk of little else beside his daughter, and, glad as he was at meeting with a new listener, he began telling Michael of different incidents in Rose's childhood, of her first season in London, and of the admiration she had excited there. His affection for Forester seemed intense, and he repeated with senile iteration that he had watched to discover some fault in him but could find none. Philip had latterly given up smoking, having detected that the smell of tobacco was trying to Rose, as it is to all blind people, and he had just gone up to London on purpose to inquire about some of those books with raised letters in which the blind can read. It seems that in England there are several systems of raised letters, so that a person who can decipher one is not always able to read the others. In France there is unity, and both Mr. Graham and his son-in-law were anxious to have the French system adopted, as it would lessen difficulties, and lead to the multiplication of books for the blind. They thought this might be done by paying a publisher largely to undertake the wholesale publication of books on one system, the which would end by superseding the others, and Philip had been empowered to offer £20,000 to this end. We know that Philip had not gone up to town at all, but had spent his night at Crossbridge to steal a picture ; but Mr. Graham fancied that his absence had had no other object but that indicated.

In the midst of their conversation Michael and his guide came within sound of hammers ringing upon anvils, and Fairdale forge appeared at the bend of the road.

"That is *the* forge," exclaimed Mr. Graham suddenly, and turning pale. He hesitated to proceed, but only for an instant. "I have not passed here since the day when my child was blinded," he said. "However, I will face it," and he walked on.

At this moment Forester was seen climbing over a stile, and he waved his hand to Mr. Graham. In another moment he and Michael had been introduced to each other, and shook hands, without cordiality, with rather a repulsion on both sides.

This was involuntary, for Philip had rehearsed to himself how he should address the chaplain. He meant to be natural and civil, but he could not master a movement of antipathy that wrinkled his features as his hand touched that of the man whom he most feared; and Michael saw this, and felt the same shrinking. But he attributed Forester's manner to resentment for the past rather than to anything connected with the future, and he blamed himself for his own aversion as being mere prejudice.

They had all halted near the forge, and the blacksmith, Joe Mardles, came out perspiring, his face like a wet brick, his bare arms grimy.

"Good morning, Mester Greum," he said, respectfully; "I hope ya young leddy's in good health."

"Yes, thank you, Mardles; how are you?"

"The Lard sends me strong arms to earn my bread, sir, and a good appetite to eat ~~it~~ with, for which I the-ank His holy name; and is the wedden coming off seun, sir?"

"Very soon; here is Colonel Forester, who can answer for himself. But I see you are working with a new man; what has become of Scadding?"

"The devvle has given Bill a call, sir, and the two are enjoying themselves together," replied Mardles quietly, as he wiped his brow with the back of his hand.

"The devil! how so?"

"Why, 'e see, when a man forsakes good wettles, trade, and wages to go a de-on't know where, he's like them children of Israel, who de-anced after the ge-olden calf every time Moses turned his back, and Scriptur' says they were accounted children o' Satan, every one of them."

"I suppose Scadding will come back soon, and then you must lecture him," said Mr. Graham.

"A won't coom back to be lectured, sir, a's ge-one over the seas," said Mardles, with a shake of the head; "but the Arlmighty 'ull walk after him, and teach him one of these days that, 'he that hardeneth his neck to reproof shall suddenly be destroyed, and that

without remedy,' and the Lard 'ull root out them that led Bill Scadding astray teu, sir, for His chariots are twenty thousand, and are allus on the move hunting down sinners in every direction."

All this while Joe Mardles had studiously averted his gaze from Forester and addressed himself only to Mr. Graham, who listened placidly, as though accustomed to the man's spiritual jargon. Forester, divining an enemy in the man, eyed him superciliously, and remarked in a pretty audible tone that the fellow had a bee in his bonnet. Presently the party moved on, Mr. Graham nodding kindly to his tenant as he went. Sir Wemyss now stepped up and joined Mr. Graham and Michael, while Forester dropped behind with Frank.

"Where have you been?" inquired the latter in a whisper. "I sent up a note to you last night to say that Mrs. Baillie was going to Crossbridge."

"I have been there and seen her."

"You have heard about it then? She didn't fall in with the Hawthornes?"

"Yes; it was at their house that I met her, in the room where the portrait of Margaret and her sister hung."

"My God! and she saw the portrait?"

"No, I had taken the precaution of having it removed. I concealed myself in the garden of Ivy House at night, and Nat Riddel handed me the picture through the window whilst everybody was in bed. I did this from a presentiment that somebody from Tolminster might come by accident to Dr. Tabor's; as for Mrs. Baillie, we have nothing to fear."

"She has not learned anything then."

"She knows everything, but has become our ally;" and Forester related the events of the morning. Frank the while fretted and struck at pebbles impatiently with his stick.

"What I see in all this is that more and more people are being let into our secret every day, and the whole world will soon know it," exclaimed he, wretchedly.

"Don't be desponding just as we are going to win," answered Forester. "Nat Riddel is pretty well now, and is going to London; if you can get a week's leave, and be in town to act as intermediary betwixt him and me whilst he carries out our plans, I think that in ten days from now all our bother will be at an end."

"Oh, I've got my leave, and I'll go, for there's the money question too," sighed Frank; "but somehow we sink further into trouble at every step. First we had perjuries, now a burglary; I shouldn't wonder if we came to murder before we have done."

"No we shan't, unless you choose to murder yourself," replied Forester, bluntly. "But now tell me about your brother; how did he behave with Rose?"

"Very well; they talked about such things as a parson understands, charities and churches; and I think Mike will feel more properly in future about Miss Graham. That was my object in bringing him here."

"You did quite right. He still suspects *me*, I saw it in his look; however, once Margaret is beyond his influence he may suspect all day for anything I care. Silence now, here's Nelly come out to meet us."

They had reached the garden, where the flower-beds were bare, the fountains still, and where the marble statues seemed to shiver in the cold. Nelly with her sealskin jacket on and her hands in her muff ran down the terrace steps and tripped over the gravel path.

"Rose has been trying on her wedding dress," she said to Mr. Graham, "and I want you all to see her in it. She wished to take it off, but I said No. You will see how beautiful the wreath and veil look."

The gentlemen followed Nelly into the house and entered the drawing-room, where Mrs. Merrewether and one of Rose's maids were putting those last touches which feminine attire seems always to need even when there is nothing wrong in it. It is not for a man's pen to describe a wedding dress. These poems in silk and lace have mysteries, and what with tulle and *ruches*, loops, trains, and Mechlin point, a man gets lost. But anyhow the wreath of orange-blossoms sat supremely well on Rose's pretty head, and the long veil draped her in folds airy as summer clouds. She advanced with a blushing smile to meet her father and her lover, and from habit guided herself as well across the room as if she could see, but it was towards Michael that she held out her small hands with a movement of coaxing entreaty.

"You must not balk a bride of her whim," she said, gaily; "I have set my heart on being married by you, Mr. Christy; you will not refuse me?"

"Of course he won't refuse," interposed Frank.

"Oh, but I must have the answer from his own lips," said Rose. "I sent him a message, and am afraid it was not delivered."

"If it will give you any pleasure that I should officiate, Miss Graham——" Michael began.

"Yes it will, and greater pleasure than ever now that I know you, so please say Yes."

view that could be had from large windows which were not disguised by iron bars, the pane-frames being of iron, and quite thick enough to preclude escape. From Number 2, to which Margaret was borne, the whole of the country for miles round could be seen in a varied and picturesque panorama. To the left the town of Tolminster with the spires of its grand abbey, and two parish churches; to the right the Eastshire hills crested with woods; and in the vale between, the steeples of many a village that shone in the opal light of the morning and the orange beams of sunset. Among these villages was that of Fairdale.

Margaret was put to bed, and Mrs. Baillie with "One" was busy for an hour making her new abode comfortable. The matron had to run up and down stairs several times to superintend the removal of the prisoner's property, her arm-chair, clothes, and so forth; and she did this briskly, as she did most things connected with her duties. Dr. Hardy remained till the fire had been lit, and tried to coax Margaret into describing her symptoms, but when he found that his questions only elicited tearful requests that the unlucky photograph might be restored, he went off in a huff to read Michael a lecture on his imprudence in having excited the prisoner. He quite upset the chaplain's equanimity by the professional things he said about the complications of nervous maladies. But Michael bent his head with good grace to the reproof, for he was fain to think that if everybody deemed his conduct absurd it must needs be so.

He had received that morning a fresh letter purporting to come from Nat Riddel, and dated from London. The detective professed himself to be on the clue of further particulars proving that Colonel Forester could not have been in Scotland during the autumn of 1867, and his researches might delay him a day or two more, said he, before he presented himself at Tolminster. All this plunged Michael still further (as was intended) in the maze of perplexity, but it made him think with yearning compassion on Margaret, who was now removed from him, and left without a friend. "Be Thou her friend," was the prayer he murmured to God, not without that drooping of the heart which may afflict the best of men, whose limited vision cannot see the Almighty's hand working for them in its own way, at its own time, and with faultless wisdom.

Michael was too conscientious not to feel that he owed an *amende honorable* to his brother, and he made it. He sent a note to barracks begging Frank to come up and see him, and upon Frank's arrival towards dusk he avowed everything he had done, and begged his pardon for the suspicions he had harboured. He was indeed

most grateful that his brother had been cleared, deeply and heartily grateful, and the dragoon's attitude was well calculated to convey an idea of innocence; for Frank chose to play dignity. A pretty thing, said he, that his word should have been outweighed by that of a maniac, and that his name should have been given to a parcel of detectives as a possible liar and cheat!

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself," exclaimed he, reddening as in honest anger.

Michael pleaded the extenuating circumstances.

"Circumstances be hanged. Your eccentric doings have placed me in an invidious position. Miss Graham is wondering why you refused to read the marriage service for her, and Forester can't understand why you give him a wide berth. I trust you will come with me to Fairdale to-morrow and show proper civility to all these afflicted people."

"I will go to Fairdale if you like, Frank, but I hardly think it necessary."

"Why you look as if you had some doubts still," ejaculated Frank, disgusted. "If there's anything still on your mind up with it; let us have the worst now, and no more underhand doings. Do you or do you not believe Forester guiltless of these preposterous accusations which you brought against him?"

"I do," said Michael, whose lingering doubts seemed to melt before the righteous fire in Frank's eyes.

"Well, then, act in a becoming manner, and recollect that far from being the cold-blooded rogue you have supposed, Forester feels only too much pity for the woman who has done him such deep injury. Miss Graham, too, wants to see her acquitted. If the woman will behave with common decency she will go unpunished for her villainous offence."

"I assure you it was an unintentional offence; she sincerely deplores it," exclaimed Michael, much comforted by this promise, and speaking eagerly. "The poor woman's reason has been disturbed by some great wrong, but she is no savage."

"All that is no business of mine, and if she had to deal with me I'd give her no mercy I warrant you," declared Frank. "I am on Miss Graham's side, and so will you be when you see that poor blind girl so patient and forgiving under her trial. You've only heard one side of the case, and it's that makes you so cranky, and, to give you my opinion, I don't think you're fit for a prison chaplaincy. I always said so."

There was nothing to urge against this vehemence, considering the facts. Michael felt that Frank had cause for irritation. But

suddenly there was a lowering of the dragoon's high tone, for Captain Keyser, the governor, walked into the room. He looked formidable. His hat was planted squarely on his eyebrows; his lips were puckered up tighter than drumskins, and, advancing in the twilight (for the gas was not lit), he appeared like the very ghost of the Iron Duke come back to earth to make a statement. But the tenor of this statement was mild. He had received a note from the Inspector of Police at Crossbridge requesting that some official from the prison might be sent to identify the body of Mary Dash, who had been killed in the railway accident. The matron was the proper person to go, but if the chaplain had anything that he wished the coroner to know about the deceased's family, perhaps he would not mind going instead.

"My brother cannot go, he has made an appointment with me for to-morrow," said Frank, before Michael could speak. He was thinking of the possibility of Michael's falling in with Mr. Hawthorne and with Nat Riddel at Ivy House.

"I will tell Mrs. Baillie, then. It is only a formality, so that the woman's parish may be—h'm—communicated with," remarked the governor, in his shy way.

"I will go if necessary, it would not prevent my driving over to Fairdale later with you, Frank," said Michael.

"No, no. I have business in London which will take me off in the afternoon," remonstrated the dragoon, decisively.

Captain Keyser stood writhing in his shirt and plucking disconsolately at one leg of his trousers, as if he were being vexed by a nettle. He had nothing more to say, but remained, doubting whether he ought not to say something for civility's sake, which is a way with shy men.

"I—h'm—saw in the papers that a servant of Colonel Forester's was among the injured. Do you know if he is—h'm—better?" was his civil question.

"I have not seen Colonel Forester for some days," replied Frank, who was leaning with his back to the mantel-shelf and his hands in his pockets; and upon this Captain Keyser retreated sideways, like a lurcher.

"The papers say that Forester has been visiting his servant daily," then observed Michael, also by way of saying something, when the door had closed.

"I suppose you contrived to make some crime out of that," responded Frank, ironically. "This servant was another witness of the marriage with Margaret Field, eh? and Forester caused the two trains to collide on purpose to kill him and get him out of the way;

but now that the plot has failed, he goes every day to Crossbridge to administer the man some arsenic in his beef-tea—isn't that it?"

"I am not so ingenious at weaving romances," said Michael, with a faint smile; "besides, the alleged witness to Mrs. Field's marriage was a Frenchman; but let us change the subject. Nelly complains that she has not seen much of you these last few days. You have been in London, haven't you?"

"Yes; and I am going there again. Do you see any objection?"

"Why should I see objections? What is the use of talking in that way, man?" and Michael laid his hand on his brother's shoulder. "I have apologized; isn't that enough for you? Don't be so crusty."

"I am crusty because your conduct has surprised and hurt me," answered Frank, shaking him off. "I thought you above anything mean. That woman seems to have turned your head, and it's annoying to see a fellow in your position spooning a lunatic and kicking at your own family to please her."

Frank, who was heedless of the pain he gave in saying this, was crusty from a variety of other reasons not specified in his discourse. He had experienced some trouble in levying money of the Jews, and had to go to town again to complete the sum he wanted. Then Nat Riddel had not recovered so fast as was hoped, and the execution of Forester's plot for getting Margaret out of prison was retarded in consequence—to the dragoon's irritation, for he was impatient to get the business over. Then he was crusty because Mrs. Baillie was to be sent to Crossbridge, and might perhaps hear of Mr. Hawthorne there (a thing which he was already speculating as to how he could prevent); and lastly, he was crusty because he perceived that under Michael's apparent contrition there did still linger a spark of doubt, which any side-wind might fan into flame. However, surly though he was, Frank agreed to stay for dinner, as he wanted to see Nelly. He walked over to the chaplain's private house, and at once delighted his betrothed by saying that Michael had promised to go to Fairdale to-morrow and be introduced to the Grahams. Nelly, as she stood on tiptoe to kiss him, clapped her hands, and said she and her father would go too, and make a party of it.

Like many young persons when they are engaged, Nelly was devoting herself in a goody-goody way to domestic pursuits. Instead of hunting, which she could not do with convenience since she had left Gorsemoor and had only job-hunters at her disposal, she tidied her cousin's house, which Mr. Jabbot had left in a condition suggestive of a raffish parson in difficulties with the Bank

ruptey Court. When Nelly came into it she found cobwebs and confusion abounding. There was fluff under the beds, and beetles on the top of them. Horsehair stuffing bulged out of torn seats, window-panes were murky, mirrors fly-blown, fire-irons rusty, and the stair-carpetts were snares to the feet by reason of missing brass rods. In a few days all this had been changed, and the serving department reformed. The one-eyed Irishwoman was relegated to scullery work, a smart parlour-maid was hired, and a cook who could roast. New carpets were ordered for the principal rooms, and Nelly set to work hemming some fine red curtains for the study, being assisted in this by the governor's daughter, the sentimental Miss Clarinda, who came in as a volunteer, and while stitching would regale her new friend with all the legendry of the prison. Miss Clarinda's famous album, full of mementoes of men that had been hanged, was sometimes produced for the joint entertainment; and when the two girls attended the chapel service together, Nelly was bidden take notice of certain prisoners, whose histories the governor's daughter would afterwards relate in minute detail, and with much pitiful expatiation on the temptings which had brought them to trouble. In this way the chaplain's cousin did not find her stay in the prison dull, though there was much in what she saw and heard to make her flesh creep.

Clarinda Keyser was invited to dinner that evening, and accepted blushing—as was her habit whenever she was to be thrown into the company of a bachelor like Michael. If a marriageable male spoke to her she turned pink, if he paid her a compliment she blushed scarlet, if he had ventured to kiss her she might have become a negress, and remained so. Frank was amused by her manner of turning up her eyes languishingly as a dying carp's, and saying, "Oh, tha-ank you!" when helped to beef. He remained till nine o'clock, and having appointed to call for Nelly and his brother at noon next day, he went off, giving the excuse of regimental duty, which is so helpful to military men. The truth is he wanted to despatch a line to Philip Forester warning him that Mrs. Baillie was going to Crossbridge. He stepped into the "Crown" and wrote a note, which he sent by an ostler on horseback, ordering him to bring the answer to barracks. In an hour the man was back with the information that Colonel Forester had gone to London, and would not be home till next day.

"Who told you he was gone to London?" asked Frank, and the man replied that the servants had told him. This set Frank wondering whether he ought himself to go to Crossbridge next day and fall in with Mrs. Baillie, so as to steer her from meeting any of

the Hawthorne household. He had received no intimation of Forester's intended journey to London, nor could he guess why the latter was going there, but he decided that on the whole he had best stick to his arrangement of taking Michael to Fairdale. Once Michael was brought in contact with Mr. Graham and his daughter, his sympathies could not fail to be enlisted in the blind girl's favour, and it was inexpedient to postpone this consummation. For all this Frank felt uneasy, and being indisposed for sleep, played some long games of *piquet* with Dicky Bool, who was now reconciled to him and won his money.

Meanwhile the night which Margaret spent was more peaceful than the last. In the infirmary she was not disturbed by the ceaseless locking and banging of neighbouring cell-doors, and in the morning there was no swabbing of passages overhead. Another advantage was that she was waited upon exclusively by Barby Haggit, for Mrs. Baillie could not be at the trouble of following the girl up the long flight of stone steps every time there was something to fetch or carry. This suited Barby, whose tongue took free rein. When she brought up the breakfast at eight o'clock she spoke a blithe good morning, and proceeded to light the fire as actively as if she were serving a lodger in an hotel. Margaret was much more placid, and lay propped by her elbow, and watching the landscape which she could see from her bed. It was slightly veiled in a fog, through which the sun shone in a pale red disk, which brightened every minute till it became golden, dispelling the mists and suffusing hill and dale with its beams.

Presently Mrs. Baillie came up, with her best bonnet and gloves on, to take a look at the patient before going to Crossbridge. She gave her leave to get up or stay in bed as she pleased, and inquired whether she liked being in the infirmary better than down below. Margaret bent her head affirmatively.

"Then you would prefer staying here till your trial?"

"Yes, if I may."

"The doctor desires you should, but you are not to have any more visits from the chaplain."

"I do not wish for any."

"And have you still no intention of writing to any of your friends?"

"No, thank you."

Mrs. Baillie lingered near the door, buttoning one of her gloves. But she did not go out, for she was moved by a strong womanly curiosity to ascertain whether "Fifteen's" name was really Hawthorne. So long as the putting of the question might have evoked

a reply which she feared to hear she had been reticent, but now that Margaret was certified to be of wandering mind she thought there could be no danger in seeking to clear up this little mystery ; for mystery there was. She coughed, and approached the subject in a round-about way.

"Are you aware that you talk in your sleep, 'Fifteen?'"

"No, I did not know it," answered Margaret, with doubt in her dark eyes.

"You were rambling last night. May I ask if your name is Hawthorne?"

"Who said?" and Margaret flushed, her voice breaking at the same time. This was confirmation enough, and Mrs. Baillie quivered ; but the prisoner had had time to reflect. "I am sure I didn't reveal that in my sleep," she exclaimed, looking at the matron ; "you heard it from Captain Christy."

"Nothing of the sort," answered Mrs. Baillie, very red.

"Why are you blushing then? You have entered into the conspiracy against me, I see. Well, what if my maiden name *was* Hawthorne? I warned Mr. Christy, and now I warn you, that it is lucky for you all I do not publish my name and bring my relatives to my rescue. Mr. Christy seems aware of this, for since he has learned my name he has thought it prudent to drop me."

"Mr. Christy does not know it. I alone heard you say something about Hawthorne in your sleep."

"Oh, don't tell me any more falsehoods, I am sick—sick of them," said Margaret, interrupting her, and turning on her pillow. "Go about your business, please. You are all growing afraid of your own wickedness, and it would go hard with you if I were a creature like yourselves."

Mrs. Baillie beat a retreat in confusion. She would have given worlds to recall her foolish question, for she had acted like a child, who from curiosity blows on the wick of a petard and sees it explode in his face.

It was a little after nine as she passed through the streets of Tolminster, where the shops were just opened, and the bustle of a market-day was commencing. The cathedral bell tolled for early service ; the grammar-school boys, with red-tasselled college-caps, were hurrying to their lessons ; and droves of cattle and grunting pigs were being driven up from the country roads. In the market-square carts were arriving laden with the produce of poultry-yard and dairy—chests full of eggs packed in straw, piles of strong-smelling Eastshire cheeses, and rows of plump fowls, whose denuded necks were soon dangling from the shelves of poulterers' stalls.

All this Mrs. Baillie observed not, but as she hurried to the station with a palpitating heart she asked herself, "What does all this mean? What ought I to do? Who can that woman's parents be?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARGARET'S FAMILY.

WE know that Mr. Hawthorne of Ivy House was Margaret's father, and it must now be added that these Hawthornes were good people.

Clement Hawthorne had been a merchant, and during the first five-and-fifty years of his life, it never crossed his mind that he should turn Quaker. He was rather worldly-minded than pious. He loved ostentation and fine company; he had ambitious views about his daughters. Both girls were educated by first-rate governesses; they learned to play the piano, ride, dance, and talk French. Their father satisfied all their whims, and would have been glad to see them even more capricious than they were. He did his best to spoil them, and would have succeeded if it had not been for their mother, who was more prudent than he.

But one day ruin came—not ruin at one blow, but progressive, like leaks letting water into a ship's hold. While the merchant struggled against it—working at the pumps, so to say—his character profoundly changed. At Manchester, where he resided, he happened to hear a revivalist preacher, who stirred to its depths a fund of religiousness which had long lain dormant in him; the conversations of his Quaker friend completed his conversion, and Mr. Hawthorne passed from the extreme of worldly indifference to the farthest point of faith and puritanical observance. As his affairs began to mend at the time when his manners improved, he took it as a sign that Heaven was pleased with the course he had chosen. Therefore he persevered in it with the immoderate ardour of a proselyte. His one object pecuniarily became, not to restore his house of business to its former footing, on which Belial had put it, so he said, but to wind up its accounts honourably; and in this he succeeded. He paid off his creditors to the last penny, and retired with £600 a-year—a mere pittance beside his previous income, but wealth in respect to his altered needs, which were few.

Mr. Hawthorne's family, however, could hardly accept their downfall with such serene philosophy as he. Mrs. Hawthorne did not become a Quakeress. She had always been religious in an undemonstrative way, and became a little more so, but there was a touch of acidity in her manner—the result of humbled pride; and, being disposed to look upon her husband's transformation as a proof that his intellect was slightly deranged, she avoided arguing with him, but visited her querulousness upon her children, whom she accused of failing in respect towards their father. The truth is, the two girls could not understand the change that had come over their household. It was the passage from midsummer to Arctic cold. The things they had been taught to do were forbidden them. Their favourite occupations were pronounced ungodly. They were put into grey gowns, and were preached to—affectionately, indeed, but not less tiresomely—every time they moved their fingers or opened their lips.

Violet soon escaped from the tedium of an existence which was growing insupportable by marrying Dr. Tabor—a man whose genial nature and firmness exercised a happy effect on her character. She had more inborn aptitude than Sybil (for by this name was Margaret known—at home) to go wrong, being at once more petulant and headstrong; but wives become pretty much what their husbands make them, and Mrs. Tabor developed into a reasonable woman and an excellent mother. Sybil, who remained at home for two years and a half after her sister's marriage, suffered wofully from her loneliness. So long as the girls had shared their little troubles together these had seemed comparatively light, but when Sybil found herself obliged to bear everything alone, irritation took the place of submissiveness, and she lived in a state of ill-suppressed rebellion against burdens which seemed too grievous for her young shoulders.

Mr. Hawthorne used to allude to the epoch before his conversion as the time when he was “in the bondage of sin.” He described everything as a “visitation,” whether it were a serious misfortune or a cold in the head. If the tea was lukewarm he thanked the Almighty for trying his temper in little things. He talked of the devil as of a personage constantly at his elbow, and bantered him aloud on being such an impotent creature when resisted. All this was good in its way, but fatiguing.

Mrs. Hawthorne, desirous of upholding her husband's authority, checked every leaning towards levity on her daughter's part. Violet also, who on becoming a mother herself grew more alive to children's duties towards their parents, lectured her sister as to the desirability

of submission, so that Margaret, or Sybil, grew weary of going to see her. Sybil's character had always been merry, and she committed the mistake of thinking that her father's neo-puritanism was mere hypocrisy. She further decided that he was selfish, whereas he loved her far more than himself; so did her mother love her, and a little mutual forbearance might easily have converted Mrs. Hawthorne and her child into fast allies. Sybil's girlish good sense, however, resented being told that all the lessons of her childhood were wrong, that her father had been a miserable sinner until the day when he took to wearing a low-crowned hat, that there was sin in music, earrings, and novels, and that the devil rubbed his clawed hands every time she put a cherry ribbon in her hair. She wore the cherry ribbon for all that, and attended ritualist churches out of sheer contrariness, and once or twice threatened to run away from home if she were so incessantly teased. It was after one of these outbursts of temper that her parents reluctantly gave their consent to her going to spend a month with a former governess who lay ill at Woolwich. This was the last that Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne saw of their refractory child, and we know what befell of the escapade. Being in such a humour that she would have hired herself out as a nursemaid sooner than return home, the home-bred girl easily fell a prey to the wiles of a seducer like Philip Forester; and when she wrote that she had married "a retired officer" and was going to America, her parents were more afflicted than surprised by this undutifully abrupt proceeding. They sorrowfully admitted to each other that they had done wrong to thwart the girl's inclinations, they remembered only her lovable qualities, and the conviction of the errors they had committed strengthened itself in their minds in proportion as Mr. Hawthorne, outgrowing the zeal of the convert, mellowed into a simple, benevolent Christian, taking the kindest views of all things, and especially of human waywardness.

He became, in fact, a confirmed philanthropist, ridiculous only to those who stood in no need of his charity. Mrs. Hawthorne comforted him, and was always of his opinion—a brisk little woman, who had the same vivacious eyes as her daughters, and was the model of a good wife, in that she could hold her tongue under control whenever it was likely to say anything that might pain her husband. The old people often came to visit their daughter Violet, and not a day passed without Sybil's name being mentioned among them in terms of forgiving love—pervaded, indeed, by anxious sadness, as months and then years passed without bringing news of the runaway. The distressed parents had set up a theory to explain the long silence of their absent child. They said: "Our daughter's

marriage has not been a happy one. When Sybil becomes a mother she will know what a parent's feelings are, and let us hear from her." Violet concurred in this idea, and it had become an accepted conclusion in the family that whatever feeling it was that hindered Sybil from writing—pride or shame—would melt away when the young mother was recalled to the memories of her childhood by a pair of baby lips.

So things were at this pass when the Crossbridge accident occurred and brought Philip Forester under Dr. Tabor's roof. Not for a moment could Clement Hawthorne suspect that in the polished gentleman who came every day to sit for an hour with a wounded servant he saw his daughter's seducer. He and the Tabors knew Colonel Forester by report as betrothed to "the beautiful Miss Graham," and they had read in the papers of Margaret Field's offence; but how could they connect this alleged madwoman with their Sybil

Margaret was truly Sybil's second name, but she had never been called by it at home. She had adopted it as girls often do adopt new names when they want to discard everything appertaining to a past life which has not been happy. It is refreshing in such cases to be addressed by a lover in a name which nobody else has breathed; moreover, Philip liked Margaret with its pet abbreviations—*Madge* and *Maggie*—better than Sybil, and this was enough.

Neither Mr. Hawthorne nor Violet had noticed the startled looks which Colonel Forester cast at Margaret's portrait on his first perceiving it, and they detected nothing peculiar in his manner at his subsequent visits. He was sad-faced, and his ceremonious politeness kept the talkative Quaker at arm's length; but Violet thought this manner becoming, and it rendered the Colonel more interesting in her sight. Was not his coming bride blind? and had he not a further excuse for his melancholy in the ailing condition of the servant to whom he seemed so attached? It looked very admirable to Violet that the Colonel should pay so much attention to his servant, and she commended his example to her two children,—aged four and three respectively,—saying that little people who wanted to become good grown-up people ought to be kindly affectioned towards their domestics.

Violet also did her best in the way of jellies and chicken-broths to hasten the sufferer's convalescence, and was happy to give a report of his advancing cure every day when the Colonel called. But this advance was far too slow to Forester's mind. He watched the sick rogue's bedside with looks of bridled anger, and could have flogged him in his impatience to see him up and stirring. When a few

days' repose had at length strung Nat Riddel's nerves like the chords of a damaged fiddle, making him a fit instrument to play an ugly tune upon, then Forester, without any concern for his lingering feebleness, set him to work planning schemes that made his head split. The detective's weak will was like potter's clay in the stronger man's hands. He agreed to find an individual who should personate Captain Field; he knew of such a one—"a clever chap, not too scrupulous, yet trustworthy;" but this would require money. Philip promised money, and kept on urging Nat Riddel to get well. Sometimes he propped him with an elbow to help him walk round the room, and was puzzled that a man who had no bones broken nor sprains should make such hideous limping. But it was characteristic of him that he never showed temper, and rather won the detective by his kindness. There are no such actors as those of real life.

Nevertheless, after each of these interviews Nat Riddel lapsed prostrate from being obliged to make too great an effort of sustained attention, and he would lie on his back for hours unable to sleep, speak, or think. His brain felt like a punctured bladder, with a hole in it too big to be ever mended. Towards evening he generally rallied, and then he found relief in the society of his fellow-sufferer, the Rev. Peter Vigus, who came and sat beside him with his dog Touzel, and smoked a pipe, saying nothing, which mute companionship is the pleasantest to a man whose nerves are out of order.

Peter Vigus's face was patched with white sticking-plaster like a cracked china bowl. One patch bestrode the bridge of his nose, and gave him the aspect of an Irish curate who has been enjoying himself at a wake. Barring these gashes, which bade fair to spoil what little beauty he had ever had, he was but slightly hurt, and his accident had not damped his spirits, which were exuberant. He was a lover of dogs, children, and men. He said that Christian duty consists in loving one's neighbour, and his wife too, which was his jocular way of showing esteem for the fair sex. Bishops, however, thought he jested overmuch, for in the application of his three favourite maxims—"Take it easy," "It's not worth fighting about," and "Treat it as a joke,"—he involved things which the higher clergy won't treat as jokes, and do think it worth fighting about. He was always laughing, and if there was nothing to laugh at he contrived something. His latest exploit in this way had cost him a curacy, for—being in a diocese where the bishop, though a mild man, had a pugnacious chaplain, who drew up fiery charges which his lordship signed—it happened one day at a confirmation dinner that the good prelate said to the curate: "Have you read my last

charge, Mr. Vigus?" "Yes, my lord; *have you?*" responded the curate; and the chaplain, who was sitting by, never forgave the titter that was raised on this occasion.

Nat Riddel was not in a position to judge of his clerical friend's facetiousness, but the Hawthornes and Tabors soon found him out, and he established himself as a favourite in the parlour. He played with the two children, and amused them with the tricks of his dog Touzel, who, said he, had been taught to know a fool by sight and to howl at him, which rendered him unpopular in fine company. He entered into all the Quaker's whims, and discussed pickling and potting with Mrs. Hawthorne. Dr. Tabor would not let him leave the house until he was well enough to take his plasters off, and there was some benevolence in this hospitality, for he had gathered that the Rev. Peter was out of work for the present, and not easy in his circumstances.

But the genial Mr. Vigus had one defect—as we all have; he could not set foot out of doors without making friends with stray curs, and he brought back their fleas into the house. The inmates of any room which he entered were apt to become suddenly silent and to wear absent looks, like Laputans musing on the differential calculus. The children writhed in their frocks, and had to be undressed with maternal solicitude. After a few days, when the dwellers at Ivy House had become sufficiently familiar with their guest, they called his attention, with pathetic amusement, to this inconvenience.

"Friend Vigus," said the Quaker, rubbing a red spot on his ear, "the Almighty created nothing in vain, and I suppose that in the scheme of creation even fleas have their uses."

"They were possibly meant to teach cleanliness," answered the young clergyman, jocularly.

"Though thou sayest it in mirth, the observation hath depth and truth, friend; but then thou shouldst wash thy dog Touzel with soap and water."

The Rev. Peter undertook that the thing should be done if he could have the loan of a tub. "Fleas may be called the inventors of soap," laughed he. "At the bottom of every difficulty lies an invention, and the difficulty of coping with the primitive fleas must have suggested the combination of soda and oil."

"And the scrubbing-brush, friend," added the Quaker. "Mind thou scrubbest thy dog, who, being wise, will bless thee for it in his own way."

Touzel slept at the foot of his master's bed, having first usurped this right in the teeth of protests, and consecrated it subsequently

by custom. On the night of his washing he curled himself up in his usual place, somewhat sulky to find himself so clean, and he was soon asleep; so was his master. They had gone to bed at ten o'clock, leaving Dr. and Mrs. Tabor still up in the consulting room, for the Doctor had a number of medicines to mix for the patients lately thrown on his hands. Now that night Ivy House was to be the scene of a singular occurrence, very mysterious.

It was in the dead of night when Mr. Vigus was suddenly awake by a series of low growls emitted by Touzel. This Scotch-terrier never growled amiss, having nought of the mongrel in him, and being wont to weigh his barks as prudent bipeds do their words. His present growls were angry, and he soon jumped off the bed to run sniffing round the room and stop under the window, where he commenced barking.

"Take it easy," grumbled his master, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "What's the matter, there?"

Touzel had leaped on to a chair, and put his forefeet against the window-ledge, barking in that short, muffled tone which is the "stage-aside" of dogs. His master struck a match and lit the candle, then slid out of bed. His room was situated in the rear of the house, and the window looked out on to the garden. He was at no pains to guess that something must be taking place there, and threw up the sash, letting in a cold gust of night air which made him shiver, though it satisfied Touzel. With his tail stiff as a crowbar, the dog continued to snarl.

At first Peter Vigus could perceive nothing save the bare branches of elms waving in the wind, but he soon heard the cracking of twigs, as under a human foot, and, his eyes growing used to the darkness, distinctly saw a human form cross one of the gravel paths and disappear among some lilac bushes contiguous to the boundary fence. It was the sight of an instant, and then everything was quiet; even the dog, content to see his master investigate the mystery, vapoured off his uneasiness in a diminishing grumble.

The curate's first thought was burglars, and he was disposed to rouse the house, but one consideration checked him. There was at Ivy House a pretty housemaid named Ruth, and that very evening Mrs. Tabor had mentioned that she was unquiet because of this girl having bestowed her affections on a village ne'er-do-weel, with whom she had been caught holding stolen interviews. Might not the figure crossing the gravel be that of this ne'er-do-weel, retreating from a clandestine meeting with his Abigail? A faint footfall, audible on the staircase, and which drew Touzel sniffing to the door, confirmed this view, and the more surely, as Touzel did not

bark this time. Peter Vigus did not think it worth while to open his door and confront the nocturnal prowler. Why should he make the girl ashamed, or bring her to trouble? "Treat it as a joke" was the reflection he muttered as he closed the window and retired to his bed, Touzel following.

But a few hours later, when morning had dawned, Ruth's voice was the first which the curate heard, and it came up from below in tones of loud dismay. All the household were soon afoot, and then a pretty scene was revealed, for the house had been broken into and robbed.

The window of the back parlour was wide open. The thief, or thieves, had penetrated thence into the front drawing-room, and had carried off divers articles, among them the portrait of Mrs. Tabor and her sister!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BURGLARY.

"THE inspector is up at Dr. Tabor's house, mum. It seems there has been a burglary there this night, else he would have been down here by this time. I dare say he won't be long."

"I merely wish to give him the name of this poor woman whom I have identified," said Mrs. Baillie. "Perhaps if I spoke to the sergeant it would be enough."

"You had better see the inspector, mum: it's he as keeps the register; and perhaps you'd like to see Dr. Tabor too, who attended that poor young party on her death-bed. Step into the parlour and wait."

Thus the landlord of the "Spotted Dog" of Crossbridge, whom the railway calamity had enriched. All the week he had seen wealthy and poor flock over the sanded threshold of his mean stingo-shop. He had witnessed heart-breaking scenes, heard shrieks of woe to make a man's blood freeze, and he had sold a good deal of brandy. He had come to regard all identifiers of corpses as likely customers for sustaining drinks. He wished to hustle the matron into a tap-room full of spittoons and windsor-chairs, and he hinted at a glass of something hot with sugar in it.

But Mrs. Baillie stood with her handkerchief to her mouth, gazing at the two rows of pale faces so strangely still, and could not for a

moment tear herself away. There had been thirty dead in all, but twenty had been buried the preceding day, and these remaining ten, whom the matron saw, had died of their injuries since the accident, or had not yet been claimed by their friends. They lay in the skittle-alley of the "Spotted Dog," which had been converted into a dead-house. Straw was scattered on the floor, the walls were hung with black draperies, and each corpse reposed in a coffin, with a sheet covering all of it but the face. At the further end of the alley a cardboard scroll was nailed up, on which mourners could read these words:—

"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.
HE THAT BELIEVETH ON ME, THOUGH
HE BE DEAD, YET LIVETH."

Mary Dash and her child lay side by side. The sinful mother and the little one who had not known sin both at peace together in the sleep where there is no remembrance of guilt. Mrs. Baillie had too much tact to play a comedy of mourning where she felt none, but no woman with a woman's heart could look on such a scene without strong emotion.

In Catholic countries there would have been priests watching the corpses and praying; and the feelings of those who entered the place transformed into a mortuary chapel, with altar, crucifix, and tapers, would have found the vent which human nature craves at such moments by kneeling and joining in the priest's prayers. The Protestant Church rejects orisons for the dead; and those whose sensibilities are stirred by the sight of fellow-creatures prematurely called away to judgment must carry their emotion away with them. It is better that it should be so; it is better that the lessons which sudden death teaches should be carried away in the memory to yield something more than lip-service.

Mrs. Baillie declined the publican's offer of waiting, but adopted his suggestion of going to Ivy House to find the Inspector, for she could only afford to stay an hour at Crossbridge if she would catch the mid-day return train. The man repeated his remarks about some burglars having broken into the doctor's parlour, and explained who Dr. Tabor was—a gentleman who had been indefatigable in his attentions to the wounded. He and his father-in-law, Mr. Hawthorne, had spared neither their time nor money.

"Hawthorne!" echoed Mrs. Baillie, startled at the name, for she was still full of the trouble caused by her scene with Margaret.

"Yes, mum, Mr. Hawthorne, an old Quaker gentleman—rather

"Yes, with all my heart, then."

"Thank you," she answered, gratefully; "and now, do any of you gentlemen find fault with my dress? Captain Christy, you are a great judge of such matters."

"I hope Nelly will contrive to look as well in hers, my dear," observed Sir Wemyss.

"That is a compliment, not a criticism," laughed Rose, and she turned to her father, who asked whether that was a new dress or the one he had seen her try on before, by which he meant months before.

"It's the same, papa dear," replied Rose, softly.

"I did not know that dress had remained in the house," muttered Mr. Graham, with something like a moan.

Philip Forester bit his lips, and Michael understood what was passing in his mind, for the same thought had occurred to him. This was the dress which Margaret had sewn while she was earning her bread as a milliner, and the last time Rose had tried it on it was Margaret's hands that had arranged its folds.

CHAPTER XXXI.

COLONEL FORESTER'S "IDEA."

NAT RIDDEL was better, but not cured, nor anything like it.

He went to London such a battered wreck of his former self that his employers received him with uplifted hands, wondering in what piece of devil's work he could have got the tremendous hiding that could alone account for so sudden a decrepitude. He talked of an attack of ague, and said he had been hunting for a marriage certificate. He gave the Messrs. Gehazi money—plenty of it—and they held their peace, reasoning that so long as he brought them gold and kept the castigations for himself, they need trouble their minds no further. They were Jews these gentlemen, and they were accustomed to trust Nat Riddel, because they believed him too simple to cheat them. It is a wise master that knows his own servant.

Riddel was obliged to beg a week's leave, however; and his employers gave it, convinced that he was going to embrocate himself with arnica in his ten-shillings-a-week St. Pancras lodgings. But his landlady, who thought he was a bagman travelling for the cheap

sherry and port trade, remarked that he took none of the rest which his bodily ruin required. She admired the commercial fervour of a gentleman who could gad about to press his cheap wines down the public throat when he was so ill that he could hardly drag one leg after another. The slavey was sent out every morning to fetch him a cab, and he returned in a cab late at night, climbing the uncarpeted wooden staircase with halting steps, and pausing on the landings to draw groaning breaths. Whenever he passed an odour of brandy lingered after him.

He was never drunk, but he drank all day, else he would have fainted. Clinging to the pewter counters of public-houses, or resting his elbow on the tables of city chop-houses, where he tried to eat his mid-day meal, he drank, because ardent spirits gave him the power to talk without ceasing to a man who was now his daily companion. This person's name was Redwood, and he was the man whom Riddel had hired to enact the part of "Captain Field,"—a fellow of middle height, with black beard and cunning eyes,—a rascal to be noted amongst a hundred of his feather. Evidently a broken-down gentleman, for his hands were white, and his answers had the soft inflexions of good schooling. The day when Nat Riddel sought him out in a garret near Seven Dials he had a greasy hat, a torn coat, and boots with holes in them, his hair was matted, and he looked famished; but a visit to a hairdresser's and a ready-made tailor's wrought a transformation. He evinced his familiarity with good attire by choosing dark clothes and grey gloves, and became in less than an hour a much more elegant figure than the man who had paid for thus renovating him.

When equipped Redwood played none of the pranks of a beggar on horseback. He seemed to be rather a person who has come to grief in over-reaching others than one who had squandered his substance in dissipation. A fall into poverty reads a long lesson to such men, and they stick fast in the saddle if luck sends them a second mount. This man used his money sparingly, and acted like an intelligent tool. He put up at an American hotel in Trafalgar Square, with a portmanteau full of new things; and received the visit of a respectable solicitor who came to dine with him by appointment, and remained discussing very serious matters all the evening in the smoking-room. Three days in succession the stranger drove to Gray's Inn to see this lawyer, and Nat Riddel was present at none of the conferences. He and the stranger met at odd times and places, and Nat Riddel's share of the work in progress was being reduced to the point of simply approving all that the other did. One evening they called together on a publican in Tottenham

Court Road, who introduced them into his private parlour, a place with framed pictures of Tom Sayers and John C. Heenan. This victualler, who had a broken nose and a diamond ring, said he was willing to do what they wanted "on the terms offered." He had done such things before, and never objected to obliging parties if he lost nothing by it. Another victualler in Oxford Street, who had a triple chin and an asthmatic voice like the sighing of wind through a key-hole, gave them a similar answer, and drank a bottle of wine at their expense to seal the agreement. Both these men were to second the sham Captain Field and to put in bail for Margaret's appearance at the trial if the magistrates would release her. They had no suspicion that they were aiding in a plot, but stipulated, of course, that they should be paid for their services, and that sums should be lodged in the hands of a solicitor equal to those for which they would be bound over, in order to guarantee them against risks.

Thus all things seemed to be progressing satisfactorily, and after every step in his dark business Nat Riddel telegraphed to Colonel Forester cryptographic messages, to which replies were returned through the agency of Frank Christy, for Forester was too prudent to put any of his handwriting into the detective's hands.

On the steps of the Junior United Service Club, between eight and nine in the evening, when most men are at dinner, and passers-by are few; or at the corner of some quiet street, in the afternoon; or under the portico of a theatre, where he would show himself between the acts with a white opera-coat over his evening dress, these were the places where Frank had his rendezvous with the detective. A few words, which never lasted more than a couple of minutes, and they used to separate. Frank spoke with a tranquil *hauteur*, Nat Riddel listened with the humility of a servant; and no paper passed between them, except on one occasion when the dragoon handed a bundle of bank-notes, and waited an extra minute while the detective's shaking hand scrawled a receipt on the page of a note-book. A big sum of money was represented by these "flimsies" which Frank gave up so indifferently, and it came hot from the hands of usurers.

Usurers perky and cringing; usurers who had dingy offices, and usurers who had smart hacks, which they rode in the park; usurers who were playful, and usurers who whimpered, "S'help me Gott!"—the Jew and the Gentile, Shylock and Fang, the old Obadiah and the young. Frank saw them all, and had more or less trouble with all. It is easy to rail at sixty per cent., but there are cases in which money is worth a thousand per cent. to a man with gratitude into

the bargain. Say what is the price of a loaf to the wretch who is starving, of a rope to the one who drowns, of a file to the prisoner, of an hour's time to a general in a battle. Appraise the value of security and honour, of liberty and hope; try to stake the equivalent in money of ambition and peace, of revenge or joy—not to mention pleasure, for which men give all the things just named along with their lives and souls too, not unfrequently. Money is worth what it will fetch, like other goods, and the usurer's interest is but the measure of the borrower's solvency. High interest means small credit, and small credit little character. The man who complains that a usurer has fleeced him forgets that he would never have knocked at the latter's door if he could have got a loan on better terms elsewhere; and if a man's credit be so rickety that neither friends, lawyers, nor bankers will lend him money at light interest, why should a professional lender be expected to do so? A usurer is a man who sells his money dear on the risk of never being paid for it. If the securities offered him were valid he would lend at normal rates, and be glad of the chance; if he charged small interest for bad securities he would be a simpleton, and soon bankrupt for his pains.

Philip Forester's idea of releasing Margaret was a costly one, and in order to realise it, it was necessary to have several thousand pounds in hand. Frank raised £5000 for him, but without subscribing for so much as sixty per cent., for after all their joint security was fairly good, notwithstanding that they were both over head and ears in debt. Philip had the guarantee of his marriage with Miss Graham, Frank the prospect of soon being promoted to the rank of major, also his position as heir-presumptive to Sir Wemyss Christy. He might, like Philip, have put forward his engagement with an heiress, but a soldierly delicacy, greater than his friend's, withheld him from mixing up Nelly's name with these money matters. The truth is, though, it was a hazard to lend Frank money, for he and his friend had long ago insured their lives for loans in connection with the turf; their paper was in every man's hand, the tradesmen to whom they owed money were a legion; and Frank, who would have scorned to tell a Jew a lie (so complex is human character), confessed his liabilities with a staggering good faith, which, but for the cool dignity which accompanied it, would more than once have caused cash-boxes to close up in his face. His very effrontery, perhaps, served him with a class of men, who are better connoisseurs in gentlemen than in wine (judging by the samples of the latter which they retail). He was so easy at a

bargain, he was animated by such an evident belief that the tribe of Israel were bound to rely on his word, and he owned so unblushingly to the grand muddle which would overtake his finances if any of the expectations on which he and his friend depended were to fail them, that one admiring Jew exclaimed, "S'help me Gott, Captain, there isn't anoder offisher in England to whom I'd give my moneysh in dish way."

Frank pocketed compliments and cheques, consoling himself with the reflection that the business on which he was engaged would be the last of its kind. He kept Nelly's mind at rest about his absence by writing to her every day, and making purchases on her behalf. She sent him square inches of silk which had to be matched. In his leisure hours he played rackets at Prince's, or whist at his club. Of friends in town he had no lack, and Limmer's hotel, where he stayed, was a kind of club too, whose *habitues* all knew one another, and co-operated amicably in any schemes for killing time.

A day came when Forester's plot was so far ripe that Nat Riddel could leave London for a few hours, and he went to Tolminster to see Michael Christy, thinking that if he delayed doing so any longer the chaplain might begin to marvel. Quite travestied was he, for he had shaved off his whiskers and put on a pair of spectacles, lest he should meet any one who had known him as Mr. Johnson. His cadaverous pallor and limp deportment completing the change, Michael was at a loss to know him again.

"Why are you so altered?" he inquired in dismay.

"I've had to disguise myself, sir, hunting for information, for it is delicate work," Riddel answered with a moan; "and then, I have had an attack of ague."

"A bad attack, I fear. You seem far from well yet; you should have taken rest."

"I didn't want to keep you waiting, sir, knowing how anxious you were about this case. Will you allow me to sit down? I feel unsteady."

"Pray do; come near the fire," said Michael, with concern. "Can I offer you anything?"

The detective declined with a shake of the head, and sat down, looking as ill as could be. He had been afraid to drink brandy lest the chaplain should smell it, but he missed his customary dram, and fidgeted as though he had needles and pins in his legs. His sensations expressed in his own language, were spiders crawling all over his body and inside his head, where they danced sometimes for a change.

"I have not much news to give you to-day, sir," he said, at length, evidently struggling against nausea. "You received my last telegrams?"

"Yes; you mentioned that your agent on the Continent had satisfied himself that Colonel Forester was travelling abroad in the autumn of 1867. I presume we must conclude that an *alibi* has been established?"

"Clearly, sir, I think. Nothing has come to my knowledge implicating Colonel Forester."

"And it is your own opinion that there truly was a Captain Field, whose likeness to Colonel Forester explains our prisoner's hallucination?"

"I take it the photograph which I sent you puts that beyond doubt, don't you, sir?"

"Yes," said Michael, after a moment's hesitation. "And now, how do we stand about money?"

"It's been an expensive job, sir," replied the detective, drawing some papers from his pocket.

"I suppose so, but I do not grudge the expense," answered Michael, who was simple in money matters.

A long bill had been concocted. While the chaplain was scrutinizing it, Nat Riddel inquired with a sly curiosity how Mrs. Field was. Michael's face was bent over the paper, so that he saw nothing of the curious look that flitted through the man's fishy eyes, like a will-o'-the-wisp over a bog.

"She is very ill, I am sorry to say," was his faltering rejoinder.

"Off her head, sir?"

"Depressed and feverish, so the doctor tells me, but I have not seen her for some days. I perceive that I am considerably in your debt, Mr. Riddel. I will write you a cheque."

"Thank you, sir," said the detective, rising and clutching at the mantelshelf for support. "If you should want me again I hope you will remember to write to my private address, please, sir. Otherwise the affair might, by accident, be put into other hands, and I dare say you wouldn't like other parties to hear of your suspicions?"

"Obviously not," said Michael. "If anything new should come to light I will communicate with you, Mr. Riddel."

And he thanked the rogue gratefully for his "honest service."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MARGARET'S LETTER.

MICHAEL had not seen Margaret for some days ; this meant that he had not spoken with her, for he never crossed the entrance yard of the prison without observing a forlorn little figure standing at a window of the infirmary.

The window had become Margaret's favourite station. All that she beheld from it seemed new to her after her four months' seclusion from the world, and though the country clad in its November dress is not seen to best advantage, the fields and hills, the passing flocks and yellow hayricks, were a sight in themselves which she was never tired of contemplating. The voices of waggoners cheering their teams along the road by the prison walls reached her where she stood ; sometimes the fields were red with the coats of sportsmen, following the hounds in full cry ; and when the weather was fine and the air still there floated to her ears, morning and evening, the chimes of a village steeple, full of that melting music, now sad, now joyous, which speaks to a listener as with human tongues. One day the prisoner learned that it was from Fairdale Church that these sounds were wafted, and her informant, Barby Haggitt, who was in constant attendance on her, added that there was shortly to be a grand wedding at Fairdale—Colonel Forester with Miss Graham. She had read it in the county paper on Mrs. Baillie's table.

Margaret read the papers too, but those which contained any allusion to her case were withheld from her. She never saw the *Eastshire Chronicle*, which was too full of local news ; and occasionally the weekly illustrated journals were delivered to her with a paragraph cut out. She prayed "One" to procure her the *Chronicle* for half-an-hour while Mrs. Baillie was at dinner, and promised not to say a word about it.

"Lor', mum," exclaimed Barby, "shouldn't I catch it if it was knowed I did that ! They'd put me on bread and water for two days, and set me oakum-picking for the rest of my time."

"Please do," said Margaret, entreatingly.

"Colonel Forester is that man of yours, eh," remarked Barby, leaning on her broom. "I knowed it, and I told it yer a-purpose, for I thought it ud do yer good to know the worst. What's the use of frettin' so because a man leaves yer ! They all do it."

"You don't know what it is to be left friendless," said Margaret.

"Don't I? See here, I've ten friends," and Barby spread out her ten plump fingers. "That's all that sodger chap of mine left me when he went away, and I brought to bed of my babby."

"If you will bring me the paper I promise you nobody shall hear of it," repeated Margaret, ruefully.

"No, yer won't say anything, but ye'll be crying all day and night, and missus 'ull guess something has happened."

"No, I won't cry," Margaret said.

"Will yer try to be as I am?" said Barby, energetically. "Yer think me heartless perhaps, because I don't mope over my babby that died, and maybe yer fancy I killed 'un, but I didn't. I had milk fever and overlaid the child, and then I was fool enough to think they'd say I'd murdered it, so I wrapped 'un in a newspaper and came down to Eastshire to bury him in a field, because my friends was Eastshire folks. A p'leeceman saw me, and that's how I came to get eighteen months."

"I never thought anything but what was good of you, Barby," said Margaret, with sympathy, and this touched Barby's heart.

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, for you've allus spoke civil to me, though you're a lady," exclaimed the prison girl, with a swelling at her throat; "but if I thought yer'd be so silly as to go on pining about a man as doesn't care for you, I could give yer a shaking, I could, for it makes me that wild to see yer waste yer health for one of these dratted fellars that aint no use but to fool a girl and then leave her in the straw. You haven't a child, have yer?"

"No."

"Then what's one man more than another to yer? When yer get out of pris'n choose a new sweetheart as 'ull be kind to yer, and if yer meet the first one slap his face and tell him something to aggravate him, for those men can't abear it if yer take their conceit down. O, that sodger of mine, if he thinks I care for him—O, O, Lor'!" And Barby, who didn't care for her soldier, put her apron to her eyes at the thought of him.

"I will try not to be sad. I see it is of no use," said Margaret, willing to appease the girl.

"Well, then, here's the newspaper, I've brought it in my pocket," whimpered Barby, drying her eyes. "Give it me back when I come with yer dinner."

With this recommendation and a nod she trudged off to her work, and Margaret, grasping the newspaper with nervous hands, read in it half a column of details about the coming marriage of her husband. O the torture of this perusal!

The ceremony was to be performed at Fairdale Church, but Tolminster Cathedral was going to lend its organist and choir. The presents were numerous and beautiful, and included a rich bracelet from Sir Wemyss Christy. Miss Christy, of Oakleigh, would be one of the bridesmaids; the bridegroom's best man was to be Captain Christy, of the 12th Dragoons; and the wedding service would be conducted by the Rev. Michael Christy, chaplain of Tolminster county gaol. This is what the newspaper said, and it made Margaret's blood boil.

"Ah! didn't I know it was a plot," exclaimed she, crumpling the paper and stamping it underfoot. "These Christys. Oh, the wretches! they hold him in their power. What can I do to be even with them?"

She was obliged to contain herself after this first outburst. She picked up the newspaper and smoothed it. If she betrayed her knowledge of the intended wedding Barby Haggitt would certainly be punished, and would lose all confidence in her. Though the brain of the deserted wife was in a flame, and though her heart throbbed to bursting, she had to fold her hands and moan inaudibly; but the torments of the ensuing hours bore away her fortune, and the uppermost thought in her mind was now revenge!

So long as she had been at war with her husband only, she had thought with the self-confidence of upright women that the justice of her cause would make her prevail in the end, but against a league of enemies she felt herself powerless. Michael Christy's treason seemed to her especially odious. He had lured her with false hopes, forsaken her with lame excuses, and now he was going to officiate at her husband's bigamous wedding! More than ever she felt persuaded that the Christys had a pecuniary interest in Philip Forester's marriage, and the pride, mingled with filial affection, which had hitherto prevented her from summoning her parents to her rescue was swept away now by the passionate impulse to expose the Christys and bring them to punishment. There was no time to lose, for the wedding was to take place in less than three weeks. Margaret had never suspected it would take place, if at all, till her trial was over. But even in this distress she resolved to write to her brother-in-law, Dr. Tabor, rather than to her parents.

"I will write to Joseph," she ejaculated, talking aloud, as people do when they have been long in confinement. "Perhaps he will say nothing to Violet and our parents. He was always kind to me, and would stand by me, I know, to the death. What will he think when he sees me here? I can imagine his look. Oh, it's horrible! but I have struggled long enough. These people call me

mad, and they will end by making me so if I do not defend myself, cowards that they are !”

Trembling in her passion she sat down to a rickety deal table, littered with books and papers, and wrote in a hurried hand :—

“ MY DEAR JOSEPH,

“ On receipt of this come to the Tolminster County Prison. I am confined there under the name of Margaret Field, and am in the utmost danger and grief. Say nothing about this to Violet or any one else ; I will explain all when you come ; but do not lose a moment.

“ Your unhappy sister,
“ SYBIL.”

Margaret put the letter in an envelope and wrote the address : “ Dr. Tabor, Ivy House, Crossbridge.” If she had looked into the *Eastshire Chronicle* before hiding it away in the table-drawer she would have ascertained that her father was staying at Ivy House, for there was a long account of the inquest on the victims of the railway accident, and the Quaker's care for the surviving sufferers was often mentioned in it. But Margaret thought her parents were living at their country house near Manchester. Just after she had closed her envelope Mrs. Baillie unlocked the door and introduced Dr. Hardy, who came every day to feel his patient's pulse.

“ Well, my dear,” said he, patting her hands, for he had taken to treating her like a sick child. “ Sleep pretty well last night !”

“ I am very well thank you, doctor. I have been writing to—”

“ Pulse quick, cheeks flushed, a little feverish, eh ? To whom have you been writing ?”

“ To a near relation. If I give you the letter will you see that it is posted ?”

“ Letters have to pass through the chaplain's hands. But give it to Mrs. Baillie, and she will take care it is forwarded.”

“ I can trust neither the chaplain nor Mrs. Baillie. If they had this letter they would destroy it.”

“ Soho ! does it contain their death-warrants then ?” laughed the doctor. “ Well, hand it to me, and I'll have it registered if you like.”

“ No, you treat it as a laughing matter,” said Margaret, offended. “ I have written to my relatives to come to my help, as you yourself advised me to do. It is a serious thing to me. But I will give the letter to the governor, and if he will not promise to see it

posted the visiting justices shall have it." She said this with calm vehemence.

"I am not laughing at you, my dear," Dr. Hardy began, but he was interrupted by a little scream, which Mrs. Baillie uttered as she beat the air with her hands, pretending to faint.

White as a statue, she had stood transfixed with terror while Margaret spoke. The prisoner's so sudden resolve to communicate with her friends broke upon her like a storm-cloud, but she had presence of mind enough to see that Dr. Hardy must be drawn out of the room at once. The heat of the fire was the excuse she pleaded, and she tottered out of the room. The doctor followed her, and at her request locked the door and gave her his arm to descend the stone stairs. This unexpected episode put Margaret's letter out of his mind.

But Margaret was not duped by Mrs. Baillie's stratagem. "That woman is in the plot against me," she murmured; "I always suspected it, but I know it now. She will come by and by and try and coax the letter from me." And she waited—waited as a cat waits, stealthily.

Mrs. Baillie came, in effect, but to escort Barby, who carried the dinner-tray. She had not done this for a long time. She watched that the two prisoners gave no sign to each other, and made the puzzled Barby pass out before her. To Margaret she said nothing, but as she went out the two exchanged glances like pistol-shots.

They were like a couple of people fighting a duel in a wood, neither knowing what the other meant to do, nor what step each ought to take next. But it was Mrs. Baillie's object that the letter should fall into her hands, or, if not into hers, into nobody else's.

If it came into Captain Keyser's possession long enough for him to read the address she would be ruined. She thought little of Colonel Forester or Frank Christy then, but only of her own character. Prevaricate as she might, it would come out that she had known Margaret's name, had seen Margaret's father, had become acquainted with Colonel Forester, and had nevertheless concealed all these things. She would become dishonoured in the chaplain's sight, and this just at the moment when, as she flattered herself, she was winning her way into his good graces; for Michael had been very friendly with her of late. He lingered to talk with her about her prisoners when going his rounds; he sought her advice in little things, and had proposed that she should join him in founding a prisoners' singing-class for the practice of Sunday hymns. She little thought that he courted her company because through her he

heard of Margaret, and seemed to be conversing with Margaret at second-hand. She fancied that her attractions were beginning to operate on his bachelor heart.

Should she go and confess everything to Mr. Christy, and make it appear as though she was Margaret's friend without being Frank Christy's opponent? The impulse to do this was so strong and so consonant with womanly weakness that Mrs. Baillie smoothed her hair and bent her steps towards the chaplain's room. But she really believed the story which Philip Forester had told, and shrank from committing an act of treachery towards him. He had trusted her as a gentlewoman, as an officer's widow, and his misfortunes had enlisted her sympathies. Then she thought she would go and cajole Margaret by telling her that she was shortly going to be removed from prison to join her husband, leaving her to believe that the husband in question was Forester. But Margaret would not be likely to take her word. How she blamed herself then for not having sought from the first to ingratiate herself with the prisoner! Since her visit to Crossbridge she had been especially cold and sharp. Looking upon Margaret as an adventuress who was soon to be handsomely pensioned off, what little pity she had ever felt for her had turned to a contempt which she took no pains to hide. It had not entered her head that Margaret would in some wild hour have recourse to the expedient she had hitherto spurned, and call to her friends.

In the afternoon a lucky incident occurred to bring the matron a short respite from her fears. Captain Keyser, who was busy with the storekeeper making up accounts for the monthly inspection by the magistrates, announced that he would not go round the wards that day. This gave Mrs. Baillie time to consider what she ought to do, and to-morrow, mused she, she would gain another day by saying that Margaret was asleep in bed, and had expressed a wish not to be disturbed by the governor's visit. Perhaps this falsehood might serve twice, but afterwards it would be impossible to keep the prisoner from seeing the governor, unless, in the mean while, she were removed from the prison.

This was the question: When would Colonel Forester's plans be ready for action? Mrs. Baillie sat down to her desk, resolving that her only course was to write to Forester and warn him. She took a piece of foolscap and inscribed on it in printed capitals, so that her hand might not appear in it:

"M. IS GOING TO WRITE TO HER FAMILY. I CAN STOP HER FOR TWO DAYS AT MOST. WHEN WILL YOU BE READY? ANSWER AT ONCE, AND RETURN THIS."

She then put on her bonnet and gloves, purposing to go to the railway station, send a porter in a cab to Fairdale, and wait at the station for an answer. But as she was about to start the infirmity bell rang violently. Margaret, seeing the hour for the governor's visit pass, had grown suspicious and impatient.

Mrs. Baillie ran upstairs, and in the half-light of the fire in the grate and the twilight out of doors saw the prisoner standing near the window, her features indistinct.

"I wish to see the governor, if you please," said Margaret loudly.

"He is busy to-day, and cannot come round," replied Mrs. Baillie, who fairly trembled.

"I believe you have kept him from coming to see me."

"I have done no such thing. If you will give me your letter I will see it delivered to him."

"I decline to trust you."

"Well, then, wait till to-morrow."

"Yes, I will wait, but mind, Mrs. Baillie, I mean my letter to go," said Margaret, raising her voice still louder. "You are not so deep but that I can see through your duplicity."

The matron's answer was to slam the door. She understood at that moment how some people are led to commit murder. In a few minutes she was walking fast along Tolminster High Street, her heart drooping to sickness. She found a porter at the station willing to carry her message, and sat down in the waiting-room to abide his return. If ever she had felt what degradation it was then. This miserable entanglement in falsehoods, this shrinking out like a thief to send clandestine notes, lowered her in her own esteem to the level of her own prisoners. She vowed not to be caught twice in such a net.

Nearly two hours had elapsed before the messenger returned with an envelope. It contained Mrs. Baillie's own note with but one word added: "To-morrow."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SOLICITOR'S APPLICATION.

A RED brick court-house standing a little back from the road, and fronted by a gravel sweep and a clump of evergreens; a police-station annexed with a blue oil-lamp over the door; a throng of boy-

bumpkins hanging about, and a tightly-buttoned inspector standing in the doorway with two or three "charges" on blue foolscap in his red fist ; such was the exterior *mise en scène* of the Fairdale village tribunal where the Messrs. Armstrong, father and son, and Admiral Woodstock were wont to administer justice in petty sessions.

Inside there was a mixed smell of coal-smoke from a fire just lighted, and cabbages being boiled by the inspector's wife, who resided on the premises, and whose kitchen was contiguous to the court-room. This room was large and shone with varnish. A barrier divided and railed off a pen at the lower end, where the rustic vulgar massed themselves to hear their fellows tried on charges of petty theft or vagrancy.

There was not often an important case here, but one morning Mr. Topham, the magistrate's clerk, coming into court with a great deal of November mist about his blue chin and red worsted comforter, was puzzled at perceiving four strangers installed on the bench below the witness-box. One had a black beard, another a broken nose and diamond ring, a third was fat and asthmatic, and the fourth was a brisk man with brown whiskers so stiff that they looked like wings about to fly away with his head. * This one introduced himself in whispers to Mr. Topham as Mr. Pulman, of the firm Pulman and Pulman, the most eminent criminal lawyers in London, and the two talked for some minutes inaudibly near the fireplace, Mr. Topham's attitude being extremely astonished and respectful.

Presently the magistrates arrived, and little Mr. Armstrong, flanked by his son and the cork-legged Admiral, took his seat at the head of a table covered with law-books. He kept his hat on, a magisterial tradition of old days representing the majesty of the law, and which seemed to him good to preserve in these loose times of change.

"Sir," said Mr. Topham, stepping forward, and evidently flustered by the communication which he had to deliver, "here is Mr. Pulman of Gray's Inn, who has an application to make to the bench."

The eyes of the magistrates converged on to the lawyer, who was standing at the foot of the table with some papers in one hand, and in the other a double eyeglass, which he put on and off his nose while speaking. He had a dry voice very distinct in its articulation.

"Mr. Chairman," he twanged forth, "I have an application to make in the case of Margaret Field, who was committed for trial in this court on two charges of attempt to murder and aggravated

assault. I appear for the prisoner's husband, Captain Field, here present, who is prepared to offer his own bail and that of two sureties for the prisoner's appearance at the next assizes if your worships will order her release from gaol."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong, making an acoustic horn with his hand, whilst Hugh and the Admiral stared.

"This is Captain Field," continued the lawyer, pointing to the bearded gentleman, who half rose from his seat to bow. "It is not necessary, sir, that I should trouble you with a relation of all the circumstances that have led to a postponement of the present application until this day. It will be enough to mention that my client was residing in Australia, when by accident a copy of an English newspaper reporting Margaret Field's offence fell into his hands. He and his wife had parted three or four years ago, owing partly to pecuniary difficulties which Captain Field endeavoured to retrieve by emigrating. Having righted his affairs pretty quickly, he sought to communicate with his wife, but could find no clue as to her whereabouts. It was not till seven weeks ago, being at Canningville, Victoria, that he read of his wife's insane act, and hastened at once to England to offer himself as surety for the poor woman, whom he naturally desires to place under proper medical treatment and control.

"But how does he know that the prisoner is his wife?" asked Mr. Armstrong.

"There is a photograph of Mrs. Field," said Mr. Pulman, producing a carte, which being circulated among the magistrates was recognized at once for Margaret's.

"But the prisoner pretended to recognize Colonel Forester as her husband," remarked the Admiral. "I don't see that this gentleman resembles the Colonel in the least."

"There may have been some resemblance when Captain Field wore his moustaches and whiskers in military fashion, but you see he has his full beard now," answered the lawyer. "However, we can none of us account for delusions; my client suffered much from his wife's eccentricities while they were together."

"This is a very unexpected application," observed little Mr. Armstrong, quite nonplussed.

"My client, being absent, could not apply before," argued Mr. Pulman, "but he is prepared with substantial bail."

"Did he desert his wife, or was it a separation by mutual consent?" asked Hugh Armstrong, addressing the question rather to Captain Field himself than to the solicitor.

Mr. Pulman interposed.

"Acting under my advice, Captain Field must decline to answer questions," he said, with professional officiousness. "I may mention that there was no desertion, for my client left his wife provided with money, and was always willing to maintain her. But he is here at present simply to tender bail."

"Of course your client is not under examination," replied the chairman. "However, we can't let out the prisoner in this way, we must confer with the prosecutors, who may see fit to oppose the application. We should require notice of bail, too, and time to consider."

"And we should insist on heavy bail in any case," declared the Admiral.

"I will write to Mr. Graham and request him to come down to the court with Colonel Forester," said Hugh Armstrong, taking up a pen and hurrying off a few lines.

The magistrates were all three taken aback. They laid their heads together, and in the upshot Hugh's note was posted off to Fairdale in the care of a policeman. Mr. Pulman was enjoined to sit down and wait; and in the mean time Mr. Armstrong decided to go on with the cases on the charge-sheet.

Hereon an old tramp in the last stage of rottenness, as to clothes, was brought into the dock and charged with begging. A few words of evidence from the constable and the justice was meted out—fourteen days with hard labour. Then came another veteran cadger, who got three weeks for being drunk and riotous. After this a clownish lout in a smock-frock was put forward to answer whether he had truly stolen some turnips.

At these summary sessions there was seldom a lawyer to waste time in offering a defence for a prisoner. The poor wights had to struggle, 1stly, against the inspector who drew up the charges, and who conducted the prosecution with the fluency of long practice; 2ndly, against the magistrate's clerk, Mr. Topham, a quondam attorney's pupil, who, being paid by fees of so much per conviction, evinced all the keenness of a ferret in not letting delinquents slip; and 3rdly, against the trouble of their own consciences, which compelled them to bawl out uncouth confessions, and thereby seal their own condemnations, even when evidence against them was wanting. Indeed the laws of evidence as followed by city magistrates were but little respected by the despotic little squire who scrupled not to cross-question the accused themselves until there was no spirit of denial left in them. Sometimes, when a hardy churl with a dash of native wit or town-bred cunning prevaricated against palpable facts,—as when, being accused of stealing a fowl, the tall-tale beak

thereof was found on a dust-heap behind his dwelling,—the inspector, the clerk, and the bench would all shout at him together, brow-beating, harrying, and pooh-poohing, till by dint of noise the spark of truth was struck from his tongue as from a flint. This does not mean that the Messieurs Armstrong were prone to convict innocent men; it only means that no guilty ones were allowed to shelter themselves behind legal quibbles. If there was any reasonable doubt the prisoners were allowed the benefit of it; but in respect of tramps, poachers, and village toppers, punishments were often awarded rather in view of the man's antecedents than of the actual offence with which he stood charged, and, moreover, a great deal of reliance was placed on the statements of the inspector and his policeman, who, like the rest of mankind, were liable to err. Country squires know so much about the rustic—his dodginess mixed with simplicity, his foxy trickfulness and sheepish stolidity; experience has taught them so correctly that the peasant who is not constantly laborious is a loafer with his hands in every farmer's poultry-yard and potato-field, that they would think it childishness to spare a man because the chain of testimony against him was wanting in a link or two. Thus country benches are weekly sending to gaol men who doubtless deserve to go there, but who would never have been sentenced if the schoolmaster were abroad, teaching bumpkins their country's laws, and arming them with courage to hold their tongues and leave the *onus probandi* on the proper shoulders. People who say that education would do a great deal towards emptying country gaols are quite right. When Hodge soaks his mind with cheap newspapers he will be as difficult to tackle as a hedgehog with the naked hand.

The man accused of stealing turnips was standing with an imbecile stare, and twiddling a felt hat scabby with age. His prosecutor had deposed as to his villainy, and was stepping out of the witness-box, when suddenly a noise of wheels was heard, and in a moment Mr. Graham with Philip Forester walked into the court. The magistrates at once left their seats and adjourned to their consulting-room. Mr. Graham had gathered from Hugh's note a part of what had happened, and the rest was soon explained to him. He seemed to experience indescribable relief, and patted Philip's shoulder fondly.

"Thank God," he exclaimed. "Oh, would that this unhappy woman could be taken away by her friends, and never more cross our path. The thought of her coming trial is a nightmare to me."

"But these people don't contemplate withdrawing her from justice, I suppose. We couldn't sanction that, you know," exclaimed Mr. Armstrong.

"Oh, what does it matter?" ejaculated Mr. Graham. "The woman is mad, let her go and be cured if she can; neither my daughter nor I want to take any vengeance on her."

"What do you say, Forester?" asked Hugh Armstrong.

"I am in Mr. Graham's hands," replied Philip, who played his part to perfection. "This woman has done me a great deal of harm, and I am glad her husband has turned up, for else some people might have thought that there was something in her charges against me."

"Nobody would ever have thought that," protested the Admiral, in which saying the two other justices concurred.

"The question seems to be simply one of guarantee," continued Philip. "If this man can give sureties that his wife shall be placed under proper control, I think it would be an act of common humanity to let him take charge of her."

"He calls himself Captain. Captain of what, I wonder? I'll ask him that question," said the Admiral.

"And now as to bail. We must fix a substantial sum," remarked Hugh Armstrong.

Mr. Armstrong was for requiring a huge amount. Being a little man, he liked big figures, but Mr. Graham objected with animation. The discussion was carried on for a quarter of an hour, but at last, partly out of deference to Mr. Graham's rights as chief prosecutor in the case and magistrate to boot, partly out of the personal regard felt for him, the justices fixed the bail at £1000 in three sureties. Captain Field himself in £500, and the other two men at £250 apiece. An imperceptible gleam of satisfaction passed over Philip Forester's face, for he had reckoned that the amount asked would be double; and it was an important matter to him, seeing that the money was all to come out of his pocket.

So the magistrates returned into court, while Mr. Graham and Philip remained in the consulting-room. Mr. Pulman was told that the Bench acceded to his application. Margaret Field would be brought down to the court on the morrow at noon, and the recognizances would then be formally entered into. For the present Captain Field and his sureties must give their names and addresses to the clerk.

This was done. Captain Field, a swarthy man, whose glance was unsteady, but whose voice was firm, stated his age as thirty-five, and his present address as 25, B—— Street, Soho Square.

"Do you hold her Majesty's commission, sir?" asked the Admiral.

"I was in the artillery, but I resigned," was the quiet answer.

"Now then, Mr. Tucker and Mr. Tobbs, come forward, please," cried Mr. Pulman.

"Joseph Tobbs, of the 'Wheel of Fortune,' Tottenham Court Road," spoke out the first-named, introducing himself.

"Saul Tucker, of the 'Magpie and Stump,' Oxford Street," wheezed the second, who was short of breath.

Mr. Topham wrote down their names. The pair had sat till then as silent as though they had been in church, but Mr. Joseph Tobbs, who had the broken nose and diamond ring, had frequently yawned.

"I have another request to make, Mr. Chairman," said the London lawyer, putting on his double eye-glasses. "My client wishes the state of his wife's mind to be examined, and has arranged that Dr. Sprottle, the great authority on lunacy cases, shall come down to Tolminster to-morrow morning. Will the bench sign an order that the doctor may be allowed to see the prisoner?"

"I see no objection to that," answered Mr. Armstrong. "Is it desired that the prisoner should be examined before coming down to court?"

"Yes, so that we may know whether it will be necessary to place her in a private asylum."

"Oh, very well; here is the order. Does Captain Field wish to visit his wife too in the gaol?"

"No; a meeting under such circumstances would be too painful. He even thinks that if he were to see his wife in the court to-morrow it would give rise to a distressing scene, so if the bench will allow him he will remain outside while the prisoner is formally released."

"He can please himself about that so long as he attends to sign his recognizances," said Mr. Armstrong. "Mind, at twelve punctually."

Thus the matter was ended. Mr. Pulman and his friends left the court, and the magistrates went on with the case of the man who had stolen the turnips.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MATRON'S TANTRUMS.

MRS. BAILLIE was the first person at the gaol to hear of what had happened. The delinquents sentenced at the petty sessions were brought to the prison in the afternoon, and the policeman who

escorted them told the head warder, who lost no time in repeating the thing to the matron. Mrs. Baillie's heart leaped. She had passed the night in agonies, dreading that some hitch might occur which would leave her to face the dilemma opened up by Margaret's freak of writing to her friends. Now she had only to keep "Fifteen" from seeing the governor for this one day and all would go well. But suddenly her composure was upset by an idea which had never struck her before. What if Margaret, when brought up before the magistrates for her enlargement, were to make the names of her parents public and to hand to the bench the letter she had written to Dr. Tabor? The secret would be out then; the reporters would put the episode into the papers, and Colonel Forester's plot, which hung on a mere thread, would fall in ruins.

Women sometimes have inspirations of genius to guide them out of danger, but if the intuitive flash fails they cannot reason out a course of action calmly. The prison matron sat down prostrate under this new load of fear.

While she turned over a number of ideas, each wilder than the other, Michael Christy came into the wing. He had heard nothing. Mrs. Baillie had to inform him that Margaret's husband had come forward, and that she was going to be removed from prison on the following day. Her manner as she said this was studiously quiet, and she did no more than repeat word for word what she had been told by the warder, lest by expatiating she should appear to know too much. Michael's amazement may be conceived.

Wonders would never cease, then, in this extraordinary case. He had just been pondering how he might retain good counsel to defend the prisoner at her trial, so inextinguishable was his interest in her; but now thoughts were set whirling in his mind like dead leaves disturbed by a sudden gust. Out of the confusion one fact only stood clear before him, namely, that Margaret was a married woman, that her husband claimed her, and that his own concern for her behalf must now come to an end.

"Have you told her?" he asked, as soon as he could realize the new situation.

"No, she becomes so wild when anything is said to her that I am afraid," answered Mrs. Baillie.

"Perhaps this would calm her," suggested Michael; and, abruptly, a wish to see Margaret once more came upon him with irresistible force. He asked whether he could not go and wish her good-by. "It seems to me that under present circumstances a parting visit from me could not do her harm?"

"But she is in bed," said Mrs. Baillie, in alarm. "She has asked that even the governor may not be admitted to see her."

"I thought I noticed her standing at her window as I crossed the yard."

"She leaves her bed to walk about her room barefooted and almost unclothed. I have told her not to do it, but she never listens. I assure you she is not fit to be seen with her tangled hair and disorderly surroundings. And oh, Mr. Christy, you can have no idea of how she abuses you. When I think of your patient kindness to her I feel that she must be insane indeed to show so much ingratitude—that is her only excuse."

"Is she still so much incensed against me?"

"Madly; and against me too for reminding her of your goodness; but I cannot stand by and hear you maligned." Saying which, the matron, whose nerves were all jarring, shed a few tears and looked like a woman who wants to be consoled.

Michael thought she might have arranged an interview for him with the prisoner if she had pleased, and was inwardly vexed. Her tears also displeased him, for he did not view them as symptoms of a feeling for himself, but as an exhibition of spite against Margaret. He lingered a moment, hoping Mrs. Baillie would make a proposal to go and ask "Fifteen" whether the chaplain's visit would be acceptable to her, but she did not; so he questioned her coldly about some other prison matter and retired, leaving her unconsoled.

Then she was mortified at having cried, and visited her peevishness upon Barby, whose slouching form presently darkened the doorway with a clothes-basket. Barby wanted the key of the infirmary to carry Margaret the week's linen from the wash.

"You are always wanting to go to the infirmary," cried Mrs. Baillie, sharply. "You chatter with 'Fifteen' contrary to rules, and I have determined you shall no more go to her room alone."

"But, please, mum, she must have her petticoats."

"You shall take them up when I can spare a moment to go with you; besides, all that linen need not go up. 'Fifteen' will leave the prison to-morrow: her husband has bailed her out."

"Oh, mum, is 'Fifteen' a-going away?" exclaimed Barby, with open eyes.

"Mind your own business, 'One,'" retorted Mrs. Baillie, frowning. "You are growing far too familiar. Go back to your work this instant."

"Please, mum, I aint got any work beside this to do for the present."

"Do you want me to give you some oakum to pick? If you complain of being idle I will very soon find you a remedy. Do you hear?"

"One" did hear, and was off, mumbling.

When a woman of habitually equable temper gives vent to spleen, she vapours away a great deal at once. The prisoners in the laundry had a bad time of it that afternoon. One was scolded, another punished, and a third threatened. It is these tantrums of gaol authorities that constitute one of the chief hardships of prison life, for prisoners all require some little stretching of rules for their comfort, and a capricious enforcement of discipline is like the tightening of a screw on the flesh. Mrs. Baillie was not usually a fault-finder. She spared the prisoner who did her best, and reserved her severity for wilful bungling. The worse the team, the lighter must be the hand that drives.

But there were days when this prison was decidedly a stifling place to live in. The sickly steam of the laundry obscured the window-panes like a damp fog; a stench arose from the heaps of soiled linen; and the women kneading in the soapsuds had haggard looks. In the cells where the ironing was done the half-open doors let out a smell of scorched flannel coming from the pads on which the irons were tried; and the oakum-pickers in the other cells could be heard moaning as they bent over their fiddles¹ and spent their strength on knotty bits of rope sticky with tar. There was a crude glare on the whitewashed walls, and a despairing massiveness about the iron bars, the nails which studded the doors, and the polished balusters of the staircases. Even Baby Dick moped by the fire in the matron's room, having nothing to play with and looking ready to cry. There was no pleasant sound in the air—nothing but that everlasting purr of crank-wheels in the male wards, varied by the jangling of a bell at times, when a batch of men were being told off for exercise, or another batch were summoned to the treadmill.

Mrs. Baillie felt more than once that it would relieve her to scream, but she became quieter by and by when the governor appeared and accepted her untruth about Margaret without question. He said that he had received no official announcement as yet of "Fifteen's" intended release, but supposed that the magistrate's order would come down in the morning, and in that case Mrs.

¹ The "fiddle" is a kind of sling which is passed over the right knee and kept taut by the foot. It has a hook by which the hard strands of rope are shredded away when untwisted.

Baillie would have to accompany the prisoner to the court-house. All this was muttered in Captain Keyser's usual dolorous way, with jerkings of his head and legs; and not a word did he speak to show that he thought the new turn in Margaret's affairs at all strange. It would have distressed him to be asked if he thought it strange or not. Nothing in connection with prisoners surprised him.

A few minutes after the governor had gone Mrs. Baillie went and gave her key mildly to Barby, telling her to take "Fifteen's" linen to the infirmary. She had just reflected that it was foolish of her to prevent "One" from speaking to Margaret. Better leave the two alone, for Barby would be sure to inform "Fifteen" that she was to be released on the morrow, and "Fifteen" might believe from her what she would not have credited if told by the matron. Again, it was possible that, baffled in her attempts to get her letter posted, Margaret might confide the letter to her fellow-prisoner, asking her to do her best with it, either by handing it to the governor, or by posting it herself when she, Barby, left the prison, which would be in about three weeks hence. This was a mere hope to which Mrs. Baillie clung. Had she dared she would have asked Barby to coax the letter from "Fifteen," and appease her by a promise that it should be forwarded on condition of her remaining quiet, but she feared that Barby would not stoop to such treachery. Things had come to the pass that she, the matron, schemed things which a prisoner would have disdained to execute.

"You may take up the linen, 'One,' for I have not time to go with you," she said; "and you had better collect some of 'Fifteen's' things ready for packing."

"Yes, mum," replied "One," sulkily, for she was provoked at having been crossly spoken to, and sulkiness is a prisoner's only mode of protest against ill-treatment.

But Barby was a sharp girl, and she thought that Mrs. Baillie was setting a trap for her. She saw that there was something up. It could not be that the loan of the newspaper had been detected, for the matron would have been sure to mention it; but there was evidently something.

Lifting the clothes-basket, Barby trudged up the stone staircase; but half-way she let a collarette fall out, and when she had deposited the basket on the landing stole down on tip-toe, making sure that she would meet Mrs. Baillie coming up with stealthy steps to watch her. But the coast was clear. Mrs. Baillie was above such espionage as that.

Barby was so little reassured, however, that she turned the key softly in the lock, and pushing open the door, remained on the

threshold with her ear inclined to the staircase, listening. But Margaret, who thought this must be the governor's visit, came forward with her letter in her hand. She had dressed herself in black, and her hair was neatly arranged. Her first question was as to whether the governor was coming, and when she heard that this official had gone his rounds she was stirred with indignation.

"I insist upon seeing him," she exclaimed, "I have a right to do so: see what these prison rules on the wall say. Barby, if the governor does not come to me this evening I will break a window-pane and call to him the first time he passes in that yard. He passes several times a day."

"Hold yer tongue, yer," answered Barby, in a whisper. "There's summut new. Yer a-goin' to-morrah."

"Going! where? That's some untruth the matron has ordered you to tell me."

"Taint. I heard the guv'nor and the missis talking about it. Ye're a-going out on bail, and it's yer husband bails yer."

"My husband!"

"Yes; the missis is to take you afore the beaks at twelve to-morrow, and then yer'll go off and live with yer husband."

Margaret stood speechless. As we have once remarked, the belief in justice grows very strong in candid minds. The deserted wife bethought her suddenly that Philip Forester had repented of his conduct towards her, that his match with Miss Graham was broken off, that her troubles were going to end, owing to a tardy but manly confession which he had made of his misdoings in the proper quarters. Imagination carried her with one flap of its wings beyond the farthest bounds of probability, and with an instinctive movement she hid her letter in her bosom, glad now that she had not posted it.

Margaret had been from childhood as sensitive as a *mimosa*—one of those natures that shrink more from an unkind word than grosser organizations do from blows. There was perhaps a spoonful of southern blood in her veins, for her impressionability was greater than is usual with the most nervous temperaments of northern lineage. You could see this by the animation she infused into her ordinary discourse, by the vivacity of her glance, and by a little shiver, as if from cold, which thrilled over her whenever she was annoyed and tried to keep her feelings under control. She must have been greatly petted when a little girl, or she could never have lived to womanhood preserving her excitable instincts so active. Her desertion by her husband had been the first great sorrow of her life, and the cruel injustice of it, as well as the atrocity of those later

circumstances which had led her to prison, had roused in her impulses of feline revolt and fury, but they had not soured her; she believed in the possibility of good. Her heart was ice-bound, but not frost-bitten, and the least sunshine could make it thaw.

Barby had begun to rummage about the room, dragging a trunk from a corner and emptying it of its contents prior to repacking it. Her tongue wagged all the while in a semi-tone, and Margaret, who had dropped into a chair and sat gazing into the fire, listened vaguely. There was enough twilight in the room to make things seem grey; you could have discerned between a black thread and a white one, but no more. The little blue cot with its brown counterpane, the two Windsor chairs, the small deal table, threw scarcely any shadows on the bare floor. Over the chimney hung a form of daily prayer on card-board, surmounted with the text: "Cease from evil, and do good. Seek peace, and pursue it."

"I say, mum," said Barby, who did not like to talk without being answered; "Missis must have got out o' bed the wrong side this morning, she's so cross. I expex' she doan't like yer going out of prison. 'Tain't like the chaplain: he's glad. I heard him say, 'Thank God—poor woman,' or something like it."

"That's a pretence," replied Margaret, coldly; "Mr. Christy is my worst enemy here."

"I wish he'd be mine in the same sort o' way, and treat me to all those vittles he's given you," answered Barby, bluntly.

"What do you mean?"

"Why doan't you know it's he as 'a payed for all them good dinners, breakfastesses, and teas you've had. You surely doan't think them things come from the prison kitchen, do yer?"

"Dr. Hardy assured me my diet had been changed by his orders," said Margaret, scandalized.

"Git along yer," laughed Barby. "I'll tell yer what, mum, yer woan't mind my saying it, but that chaplain's a bit soft on yer. Think I usedn't to see yer both when I knocked about with my broom? He'd go off with his face a-shining when you'd spoke nicely to him, and be as weak as a big babby when you'd used him hard. Missis saw it all, and that's why she can't abide yer, for he never behaves to her as he did to you, not he; for he'd 'ave made a carpet of his body for you to walk on if you'd 'a wished it."

"You don't know what you are saying, Barby," said Margaret, flushing.

"I sees a great deal more than I says, and I says more than is good manners, perhaps," rejoined Barby, "but now ye're a-going to leave prison plain-speaking woan't hurt. I know you ladies like

to keep your feelings locked up, as we poor folks do our savings, and yer doan't fancy being courted as we do. Why if t' chaplain had took a liking to me I'd have seen it with half an eye, and pushed him to own it, till he said, 'Barby, my dear, it breaks my heart to see yer in this here prison, and I'll get yer out somehow.' That's how he'd have spoke to me, but he daren't say the like to you, though he meant it all the same; and I'd lay this head o' mine against a hard-boiled egg that it's he as shook up your husband and got him to take yer out o' this. Aye, yer may stare, but it's my belief."

"Oh!" ejaculated Margaret, rising all of a piece, but in another moment Barby had changed her tone and the subject together, and Margaret glided into her seat again, while the prison-girl with a touch of true feeling told her how glad and sorry at once she was at their impending separation. It could not enter Barby's head that she had occasioned the acutest pain by talking as she had just done, to the distraction of all Margaret's ideas. She had meant well: creatures of her sort generally do.

"I shall miss yer when ye're gone, mum," she remarked; "but I say, will yer think of me sometimes? I'm too 'umble for the likes of you to care about, but may be yer'd like to hear how I was a-gettin' on by-and-by. If yer inquire at the 'Black Lamb,' King Street, Westminster, they'll tell yer where I am. Will yer take down the address on peaper?"

"Yes," said Margaret, mechanically.

"Here's yer pen; write the 'Black Lamb.' That's it, and I do 'ope you'll get on well too. That husband o' yourn can't be such bad 'un after all, since he takes yer out, and I s'pose now he doan't mean to marry that t'other girl, eh?"

"Barby! Barby!" faltered Margaret, bursting into tears, and that was all she could say, for things that seemed plain a moment before began to look incomprehensible again now. Her bewildered mind fluttered like a bird on the open sea having no foot-hold to rest on. Not divining the cause of her emotion, but touched by the contagion of tears, Barby fell to weeping too, and proffered some uncouth assurances of sympathy. Nevertheless, as it was nigh tea-time, she lit the gas and withdrew, whimpering, with her empty basket.

When she came up again with the tea-tray, Margaret was still rocking herself near the fire, and at first she wished to send away the meal furnished at Michael Christy's expense. But for Barby's sake, who would have got into trouble for betraying this secret, she consented to let the tray remain; only it was Barby who ate the

buttered toast and the water-cress, and drank half the contents of the tea-pot, snivelling as she did so, for her eyes were not yet dry.

Descending the second time from the infirmary, Barby encountered Mrs. Baillie, who beckoned her into the parlour. There was a curious glistening in the matron's eyes, and she locked the door when "One" had walked in.

"Is 'Fifteen' pretty quiet?" she inquired.

"Yes, mum, but she wanted to see the guv'nor."

"I know; and she gave you a letter to post when you left prison, didn't she? Will you hand me that letter, if you please?"

"Letter! no she didn't, mum," exclaimed Barby, colouring.

"Undress yourself," said the matron, peremptorily.

"But please, mum——"

"Not a word. Go by the fire and strip."

Barby, staring with all her might, unhooked the body of her dress and looked again to see if the matron were in earnest. A stamp of Mrs. Baillie's foot expedited her movements. She took off her gown; her grey petticoat dropped to her feet; she removed her shift, and then her shoes and blue worsted stockings.

Mrs. Baillie was well acquainted with the talent shown by prisoners in secreting things, and she was not satisfied till Barby stood on the hearthrug in a state of nature. Then she ran her fingers through the girl's hair, making it fall on her plump white shoulders, and she ordered her to open her mouth. After this she examined her clothes one by one, turning out the pocket of the dress, the stockings, fingering the hem of the petticoat, and thrusting her hands in the furthest recesses of the shoes. After the first moment of revolt Barby was rather amused, for she imagined the matron was jealous at the idea that "Fifteen" had written to the chaplain, and jealousy was a feminine sentiment with which she could sympathize. She triumphed too over the matron's blank disappointment at finding nothing. In the way of contraband Barby's pocket only disclosed a portion of the water-cress she had reserved for supper, two lumps of sugar, and half a peeled orange, which drew no remark from the matron.

"Put on your clothes," said Mrs. Baillie, without vouchsafing any explanation; and when Barby had gone out, laughing in her sleeve, she heaved a sigh. It was partially one of relief, but her mind was still full of apprehensions as to what might happen on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUT ON BAIL.

PHILIP FORESTER had taken all his measures well, and Mr. Pulman, who had no idea that he was aiding an impudent personation, but thought his client was truly a Captain Field, seconded the plot ably. The order for Margaret's appearance before the Fairdale Bench came down to the gaol at nine o'clock in the morning, and the governor at once apprised the matron of it. Mrs. Baillie, unwilling to face the prisoner alone, sent up Miss Mac Craik to bid her be prepared by eleven, and help her with her packing. Margaret had a black trunk and a leather valise: when all her clothes had been stowed into them the infirmary room looked twice as large and bare as before.

It would have been strange if Margaret could have slept a wink through the night. On the eve of release from gaol a prisoner's rest is broken, and in the new mystery that beset Philip Forester's wife there was cause enough to make her toss on her pillow. In that dreamy state when the mind is neither awake nor dozing, but seems to float about like a boat cut adrift, she was haunted by terrible nightmares. She was afraid to meet her husband. After desiring this meeting, the prospect of the scene to which it must lead made her weep and tremble.

Towards morning she attempted to cradle her poor aching brain, and when she had dressed herself became as meek as a child, not daring to trust herself to reflect, or to speak above a murmur. Only, her nerves were at such a tension that the banging of a door, the fall of a cinder in the grate, the rustling of paper, or the sound of Miss Mac Craik's Scotch brogue, made her jar with a physical torture and forced her to close her eyes and stop her ears. She alternated between tears and an irrepressible nervous laughter. Then suddenly, because Miss Mac Craik in closing her box fumbled too long with the hasp, she had a fit of hysterics.

At eleven o'clock two flies arrived at the prison. The first was empty: in the second sat Mr. Pulman, two women, and a London doctor. Mrs. Baillie, who had already put on her bonnet, took a whiff of *sal-volatile* to compose herself for any trial that might be coming, and ran up to the infirmary, followed by Barby, who was to carry down the luggage. Margaret, pale and quiet, sat by her boxes, dressed in a dark grey waterproof cloak, and a velvet hat

with a feather. Her hands were hidden in a monkey's-skin muff with long hair.

"Will you come down, if you please, Mrs. Field?" said the matron, with intentional softness.

"Am I going before the magistrates?" asked Margaret.

"Yes; before the Fairdale Bench to be released on bail."

"Good-bye, then, Barby," said Margaret, holding out one of her hands to her fellow-prisoner. "I am much obliged to you for your care in attending to me."

"Oh, good-bye, mum—don't mention it," replied Barby, ready to blubber.

"One' will miss you very much, Mrs. Field, for you have been very kind to her," remarked Mrs. Baillie, intent on being civil. "Oh, don't give yourself the trouble." This was said because Margaret had stooped to lift one of the handles of her trunk to help Barby. The matron seized the handle with a more vigorous hand, hoisted the valise on to the lid, and made way to let Margaret pass. "Straight down, please, and hold the balusters, for the steps are steep."

Margaret had resolved to speak as little as possible, to control herself and store up her courage. She preceded the matron downstairs, and then followed her through a private door into the office-vestibule. Here she was ushered into the surgery, where Dr. Hardy was conversing with a tall, gallinaceous creature, with a great deal of shirt-collar, a cock's crest of greyish red hair, and a shrill, clucking voice.

"This is my friend, Dr. Sprottle, who has come to see you," said Dr. Hardy, kindly. "I will leave you a few minutes together," and he quitted the room.

Dr. Sprottle was the eminent authority on insanity. He was persuaded that the great Napoleon had been mad, Lord Byron too, and he has written a book to prove it. Raising his voice to an altitude which alarmed a cat on the rug, he shrieked, "Please collect yourself, Mrs. Field—don't be frightened of me. Have you often prickings in your finger-tips?"

"Never," answered Margaret, who, not having been offered a chair, sat down of her own accord, and marvelled.

"You have forgotten, I suppose. Now can you recollect when you first became subject to epileptic *vertigo*?"

"I have never been subject to epilepsy at all, and don't know what you mean."

"Obliteration of memory, I see," said Dr. Sprottle, with a *cluck-cluck*. "Yet you admit that when you tried to murder Miss

Graham of Fairdale you yielded to an irresistible impulse to take human life?"

"I admit nothing of the kind," answered Margaret, indignantly. "The whole thing was an accident."

"Perversion of the moral faculties," murmured Dr. Sprottle, standing on tiptoe, and craning his neck as if he descried a horizon full of rival cocks and innumerable hens. "Now please collect yourself, Mrs. Field, and tell me when you first became possessed of the notion that Colonel Forester was your husband?"

"On my wedding-day," was the quiet answer.

"And you still persist in that opinion?"

"Certainly I do."

"Doxomania," was Dr. Sprottle's commentary. "A dreaming of grandeurs, coronets, cheque-books. Come, Mrs. Field, don't be afraid to confess that you have often imagined yourself to be a princess of the blood."

"I don't know why you ask me these extraordinary questions. I wish you would explain yourself," said Margaret.

"Morbid suspiciousness," soliloquized Dr. Sprottle. "Meets one question by another. It's an interesting similarity of symptoms in these cases," and nodding to the patient with the air of a seer, he buried his hands in the pockets of his coat-tails, spread them far apart, so that the hind view of his trousers might be admired, and strode from the room. Dr. Hardy was waiting for him in the passage, and Dr. Sprottle said, "We must sign a certificate—it's a deep-seated case of epileptiform mania, with hysteric complications and fixed delusions. The woman may be cured with great care, but for the present she is dangerous to society."

While this learned opinion was being formed the two flies were standing in the prison-yard, and the two strong women who had come with the doctor and the lawyer, lingered near the door. One was of middle age, with a pudgy white face, which spoke of addiction to puddings and bread and butter; the other a strapping wench peppered with freckles, and with a mouth like a letter-box. Both had hard features, and were dressed like servants on their Sundays out. Their movements were as ungainly as their countenances.

The morning was cold, and both women stamped their boots on the paving-stones. They stared at the grey walls of the prison, at the barred windows, at the cellular van standing under a shed in the corner, and they stopped to chat a minute with one of the flymen, who pointed in the direction of an inner yard and told them that criminals were hanged there. He broke off to touch his

at to the chaplain, who issued from the prison, and crossing the yard, halted to speak with the gate porter under the archway. Michael had been informed that Margaret was leaving, and he only hurried near the gate to have the opportunity of seeing her once more as she passed by. He could not resist this weak longing.

Presently Margaret came out with the pair of doctors and Mr. Pulman. The two women made a step towards her, and one of them opened the fly-door. Seeing their ungenial faces, the prisoner paused with a wistful look.

"Where am I to be taken to, Dr. Hardy?" she asked.

"You are going to see your husband, my dear. Step in quickly; he's waiting for you."

"They told me I was first going before the magistrates."

"So you are, and you will see your husband in the court."

"But who are those two women?"

"They are your husband's servants, my good Mrs. Field. Pray collect yourself; don't be frightened," crowed Dr. Sprottle, and he placed a splay hand under the patient's elbow to make her move forward.

It flashed upon Margaret that she was being taken to a mad-house, and she blanched, but the thought of seeing the magistrates steadied her.

"They can't spirit me away before I have time to speak," she reflected; "I shall get a hearing in a public court;" and she entered the fly, grasping the letter to her brother-in-law, which was hidden in her muff.

Mrs. Baillie and the two women climbed in with her, Dr. Sprottle and Mr. Pulman stowing themselves into the other fly; then both vehicles moved off, Dr. Hardy waving his hand benevolently from the prison steps and wishing Margaret "a pleasant journey."

Under the archway Michael Christy was waiting with a pink spot on either cheek, and as the fly drove slowly past him he lifted his hat. Margaret coloured, but acknowledged the bow with a bend of the head and a pathetic look, half reproach, half doubt, the dumb misery of which haunted him for days.

So far things had gone smoothly for Mrs. Baillie. Margaret had not produced her letter; but how would matters end at the court? Mrs. Baillie noticed that the prisoner was fingering something inside her muff, and she distrusted the hard lines that settled near the corners of Margaret's mouth. The two flies hurried through the streets of crowded Tolminster. The last time Margaret had been driven through them a furious mob was yelling execrations at

her, and it required a strong body of police to save her from being lynched. She remembered this ; but popular wrath is evanescent, and she might now have crossed the town on foot and lonely without being molested.

This does not mean that public interest in her offence was dead ; the rustic crowd that had collected outside Fairdale court-house to see her arrive was evidence against that. The fly had to steer its way through a lane of peering faces, and some little urchins who had scrambled on to the gate-posts bent close to the windows of the vehicle and jeered. The sight of this concourse terrified Mrs. Baillie. She had counted that the formalities of bail might be accomplished in semi-privacy, but here she perceived several carriages drawn up on the off-side of the road, indicating that there was a full bench of magistrates, with possibly some of their feminine relatives come to gaze at the notorious Mrs. Field. So strong were the matron's fears, that when the fly stopped she quickly alighted, and shutting the door, told the two women to remain with the prisoner for a moment while she went into the court. Hastening past the inspector, the first person she met was Hugh Armstrong.

"Oh, Mr. Armstrong, can't we avoid bringing the prisoner into court?" she exclaimed, breathless. "She is so wild that there is sure to be a scene. She had a fit this morning? when she sees her husband she will be uncontrollable."

"It's all right," answered the young magistrate, and he explained that Captain Field had begged not to be confronted with his wife, so that he would remain in another room and there would be no "scene."

"But could not the papers be signed without her being present?"

"It will be more regular that she should appear. The whole thing won't last a minute."

"Well, then, Mr. Armstrong, if she asks about her husband let me entreat you to let her believe she is being bailed by Colonel Forester—at least don't contradict her in anything."

"Very well, we won't contradict," assented Hugh, and here he was joined by Mr. Pulman and Dr. Sprottle, who represented the prisoner's state as very critical, and besought that she might be spared undue excitement, which the magistrates promised.

So Margaret was brought into court.

In the confusion of sights and sounds which broke upon her, her head swam at first. She looked for Philip Forester and could not see him. A long buzz of remarks had followed her entrance into the dock, and a policeman shouted "Silence" to the bumpkin audience that was squeezed behind the bar, offering to the eye a jumble

of soiled smocks and corduroys. On the prisoner's right half-a-dozen justices were seated at the table covered with law books; behind them some ladies, who whispered and stared stonily. At the foot of the table stood Mr. Tobbs with the broken nose, and the obese Mr. Tucker, to both of whom an oath was administered and who signed a paper. Then Mr. Topham, the clerk, addressed Margaret in a galloping tone, and made a statement of which she understood nothing.

She caught disjointed fragments: "Our Sovereign Lady the Queen," "Five hundred pounds," "Surrender at the forthcoming assizes."

"You are discharged from custody," said Mr. Armstrong senior, as soon as the clerk had finished, and Mrs. Baillie tugged at her sleeve to make her leave the dock.

Now was the time to speak if at all, and, despite the intimidation under which she laboured owing to the crowd, the rude stares, and the absence of a single friend to support her, Margaret meant to speak. But just as she clung nervously to the dock rail and muttered her first words, which were choked by her weakness, Mrs. Baillie, whose face was crimson, leaned and whispered in her ear: "For God's sake say nothing, or you'll ruin your husband; he has had the utmost difficulty in getting you out; you'll see him in London, and he will explain. We have all been working for you—your father and mother, Dr. Tabor and your sister Violet. You see I know everything. A word of yours may send Colonel Forester to Portland."

"Is that true?" faltered Margaret, startled to hear the name of her sister on the matron's lips.

"I swear it is. We have had to save you from Mr. Graham's vengeance. Come along, you are free now," and drawing Margaret by the arm, she half led, half thrust her through the door which a policeman held open and forthwith closed, somewhat to the amazement of the magistrates, who had not expected to see matters end so peaceably. In another moment Margaret was again in the fly with the two women, who had not come into court. This time Dr. Sprottle climbed in with her, and Mr. Pulman ascended to the box beside the coachman, who was ordered to drive to the station. Mrs. Baillie had disappeared, overjoyed at her stratagem, and doubly glad at being now rid of her prisoner for good.

"You are free now!" These were the words that rang in Margaret's ears. How could she suspect that a false husband had been trumped up for her—that lawyers, doctors, justices were all encompassing her with an intricate conspiracy? Women are not fitted to

cope alone with such situations as that in which Margaret stood placed. The mere mention of her husband's name had sufficed to exact from her that wifely obedience which her sex yield by instinct, even though men have forfeited the right to command them. If Philip Forester were really working for her good, it would be a crime to thwart him. This was her uppermost thought, and then the assurance that her parents and her sister knew of her plight and were co-operating with her husband staggered her. It was pitiful to see the dazed expression that settled on her wan features as she surrendered herself to her fate. She resolved again to be patient, to wait until she arrived in London, and see then what would happen. "These mysteries must be cleared up soon," she mused wearily.

The fly soon reached the station; Dr. Sprottle took tickets for London, and secured a private compartment for himself, the lawyer, and the three women. The distance to London was about fifty miles, and the journey was performed fast, for the train only stopped at one station. Margaret took refuge in silence, and sat with her hands in her muff, on one of the middle seats. Her four companions had installed themselves each in a corner, and by this arrangement kept her, as it were, picketed between them. Mr. Pulman offered her a newspaper, which she would have declined, even if Dr. Sprottle had not officiously interposed with the remark that reading in a railway carriage is hurtful to the brain. Mr. Pulman, taking small heed of this recommendation, drew some papers from a carpet-bag and read all the way, for he was a busy man who passed his life in extricating clients from the meshes of the law, and could not afford to waste an hour. Dr. Sprottle relaxed his mighty intellect by stretching his legs and closing his eyes. The two servants sat on the edges of their seats, staring out of the window and talking in low tones about the objects of interest that flew by them; but at the least movement of Margaret's they started round, alert and watchful as a pair of lynxes.

The London terminus was reached, and here Mr. Pulman took leave of them in a furtive way, for he decamped without speaking to Margaret. Dr. Sprottle requested a porter to call a cab, and assisted his patient to step into it. The younger of the women got in with her, but the other one remained talking with the doctor, and was some minutes before she joined them. To Margaret's surprise, Dr. Sprottle, having favoured her with a wave of the hand, marched off, and when the elderly servant had ensconced herself beside her companion on the front seat, the cab drove off without him. This rather added to Margaret's apprehensions, for the presence of a pro-

professional man offers some guarantee of protection to a woman who does not know whither she is being taken, whereas it was terrifying to be alone with those two strange females, who eyed her with a doggish stolidity and made no overtures towards conversation.

Out into the roar of the city, amongst omnibuses and flying hansoms, the cab picked its way at a jog-trot, threading one after another all the great avenues of the East-End. Margaret knew London well, but what Londoner except a cabman really knows anything of the elephantine metropolis beyond its principal arteries and landmarks? A turn up a narrow street in the Finsbury district led the vehicle through acres of thoroughfares never seen before—silent streets full of ugly houses, occasional shabby shops, and now and then at corners, leading up to dark slums, hordes of dirty children playing with scurvy dogs amid heaps of cinders and cabbage-stalks. For all that ocean of commerce and life which flowed within ear-shot, a woman might feel as desolate amid these wilds of smoky brick as in the bleakness of a Russian steppe. Margaret had taken the courage to be patient, but the fear of the unknown—the most dreadful of fears—came creeping over her, and she broke the silence by abruptly asking the elder woman what her name was?

"My name is Bridget, mum, but they sometimes call me Mrs. Puckram," was the civil answer, given shyly.

"And yours?" asked Margaret of the other.

"Mine's Jemima Horris."

"Have we much further to go, Mrs. Puckram?" next inquired Margaret.

"Not much further, I think, mum; but you must know these parts better than we do, for we're taking you to your husband's house," and there were two points of interrogation in her milky blue eyes.

"I dessay you'll be pleased to see him, and it's certain he'll be glad to see you," added Jemima, more unceremoniously.

"What makes you think he will be glad to see me?" asked Margaret, scrutinizing the girl's face for a responsive gleam of human feeling.

"Why lawk, mum, if he could get a thousand pound bail to take you out of that prison, be sure he's fond of you. I wish summun 'ud think *me* worth a thousand pund."

Here the cabman pulled up to ask his way of a potman with a white apron. A few more turns of the wheels and the vehicle stopped before a house of ancient aspect, which might have been a fashionable residence in the days of Hogarth. It was grimy and out of repair; the door-steps were cracked, the area railings rusty,

but relics of its bygone splendour survived in the shape of an iron arch with a scroll-work of leaves, and a ring where an oil-lamp had once hung; also two extinguishers, where the linkmen, who had escorted coaches or sedan-chairs home after tardy junketings in Soho, used to put out their torches of resin.

Before the driver could descend and rap with the lion-head knocker, the door opened and a sickly-looking man emerged. Nat Riddel—for it was he—assisted Margaret to get out of the cab, and the three women entered the house together. But Bridget and Jemima were shown into a room on the ground-floor, while Margaret was politely requested to follow her guide upstairs. He conducted her to a spacious, faded drawing-room where there was a fire; then he made an obeisance and left her.

Whatever this house might be, it was not a mad-house. There were no gratings before the three tall windows looking into the street; there were no sounds of voices in the habitation. The furniture was modern, but worn out and tawdry, nor was there enough of it to fill an apartment of such lordly proportions. The noble chimney-piece with vestiges of marble sculpturing, the walls covered with painted and carved panellings sadly cracked in places, but not past restoring, the moulded cornices of the concave ceiling, where the rosace of a departed chandelier still figured, blackened but undamaged, would have delighted a lover of bric-a-brac. Margaret only felt the chilliness of the place, and stood at a window watching the cabman, who, having just been paid, was tucking a horse-cloth over his knees and moving off.

Suddenly there were steps in the room. Margaret turned and beheld Philip Forester.

Trembling and motionless, she saw him advance with unfearing steps as if he had left her but yesterday.

"How do you do, Margaret?" he said quietly, and taking one of her hands drew her to him and kissed her. "And now come and sit by the fire," he continued, with marital authoritativeness. "I am sure you must feel cold; and we are going to have a talk together."

All this was said and done in less time than it takes to read.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A HANDSOME OFFER.

THE house to which Margaret had been brought had been hired ready-furnished to serve as head-quarters to "Captain Field," and also in view of Philip Forester's meeting with Margaret. A few minutes after Margaret had entered it, her sham husband, who, unseen, had travelled from Tolminster in the same train as herself, let himself in with a latch-key and hurried upstairs to a room where Nat Riddel was waiting for him. Philip's valet, Edward Jasper, was in the lower part of the house ready to bear assistance if required.

Dr. Sprottle's two women-servants were of course ignorant of Colonel Forester's presence in the place. A luncheon had been spread for them in the parlour, and they ate and drank pending the "mad lady's" interview with her husband. Their instructions were to obey Captain Field's orders. If his wife proved unmanageable they were to convey her to an asylum; if he decided upon keeping his wife they were to return to the asylum alone. Thus Philip Forester held Margaret in his power, and, in case of her noncompliance with his proposals, had the means of consigning her to a new prison worse than the one she had left.

His unexpected accosting of his wife was effected in a moment. Margaret's emotion was so deep that she could not utter a word. She dropped on to the sofa, and tears trickled from her eyes convulsively, whilst her whole body was agitated by spasms. It was natural that she should say nothing, for her husband's wrongs towards her were so great that it was for him to speak the first word. It was for him to justify himself, to beg her forgiveness, and there was a moment, poor woman, when she thought he was going to do it, and restore her to the place in his affections which was her due. Had he done this, she might have forgiven everything, for, enfeebled as she was, his mere presence had operated on her resentment like the sun's rays on snow.

But Philip's first sentence set her upon her guard. It was not a clever one for a man of so much habitual tact; he also committed a blunder of action, for instead of sitting beside her, clasping her hands, and making her nestle upon his breast to cry out all her grief there, —which might have rendered her docile as a child, and ready to grant whatever he might have craved of her as a favour,—he stood

near the mantel-shelf with an affectation of composure not suited to the circumstance.

"Margaret," he said, coldly, "I have had a terrible to-do to get you out of that prison, and if you want to be saved further trouble you must put yourself entirely in my hands."

She made no answer, only drew out her handkerchief and tried to dry her eyes.

"I know I behaved very badly," he continued, too much as if he were condescending, "but when I wrote to you that my father was ill it was the truth, I assure you; and then I never thought that you looked upon that mock marriage of ours as a reality. It would have been an inconsiderate thing to make you my wife at that date, for I had no money to marry upon."

Again no answer. Philip felt he was going on the wrong tack, and lost a little of his assurance, which prevented him from retrieving the mistake that a man commits every time he appeals to a woman's reason instead of her heart.

"I really imagined I was doing you a service in leaving you free to choose a more eligible man," he proceeded, lamely. "I sent you some money, you remember, and thought that—pretty and charming as you were, and are now—you would have no difficulty in finding a good husband. You know you took our relations too much *au sérieux*; we should have been terribly wretched if we had married on nothing a year. To begin with, my creditors would have pounced upon me and made me spend my honeymoon in Whitecross Street. No doubt I ought to have explained matters to you in person instead of writing, but I was afraid of your tears and my own weakness. However, by your assault on Miss Graham you have now placed us all in such a fix that it is of no use referring to bygones, we must look to the future."

"Will you come to the point, please, and explain why I have been brought here?" said Margaret, drying her eyes, and speaking with dignity. She was angry with herself for having allowed him to kiss her. The touch of his lips felt like a soil on her cheek.

"Why I want to save you, Margaret, and nothing else. I am ready to atone, to the utmost extent of my power, for the wrong I did you."

"There is but one atonement you can make me, and that is to acknowledge me as your wife."

"I cannot do that, but here is my proposal. If you will start for America to-morrow I will allow you five hundred a year as long as I live."

"America or elsewhere, it is all one to me," said Margaret. "Your

wife must reside wherever you may direct. Will you accompany me to America?"

"You don't understand," replied Philip, frowning. "I can no more afford to marry you now than three years ago; besides, I am engaged to Miss Graham."

"Then it is out of Miss Graham's money that you purpose making me an allowance?"

"My wife's money will be my own. Now do be a sensible woman, and consider our positions calmly."

"Our position is a very plain one, Colonel Forester. I am your wife, and you can marry no one else so long as I am alive. If you cannot afford to maintain me I will work for my living, as I did after you deserted me. As for you, do what you please except commit bigamy."

"But it wouldn't be bigamy. I repeat that our Scotch marriage was only a piece of pleasantry."

"A piece of pleasantry, was it? Did you tell me so when, on the faith of it, I gave you my hand?"

Philip made a gesture of assent.

"I have just owned that I behaved badly, shamefully even, but this does not alter our situations. You have a criminal charge hanging over you, and must be got out of the country. As for me, I have publicly denied that I ever knew you, and must stand by that assertion under pain of being totally ruined in character and circumstances. What would it profit that I should acknowledge you as my wife if the name I gave you were that of a man beggared and disgraced? Do you think we should be very happy together? If you have the least, I do not say regard, but pity, for the unfortunate predicament in which I stand placed, you will not enforce your claims upon me for the mere sake of seeing me crushed."

"I have no wish to harm you," said Margaret, quietly. "If it would damage you to reveal our marriage, let it remain a secret between you and me. But though we may live apart, I shall not the less be your wife, for I believed in the validity of our marriage when I consented to it, and am consequently wedded to you by your honour, whether the ceremony were regular in law or not."

"But, my dear child, can't you understand that I have my creditors to think of?"

"Your friends are influential; they can obtain you some appointment where economy would enable you to pay your debts."

"But I am engaged to Miss Graham, and bound in honour to marry her."

"How can a man pledge his honour to do a dishonourable thing?"

"Well, then, if you want to know the truth, I love Miss Graham with all my heart and soul," broke out Philip, in exasperation. "I told you so already on the day when we met at Fairdale, but since then I love her ten times more. You blinded her by your savage act of vengeance,—for, before the Lord, I believe you did it intentionally—and you owe her an expiation. She loves me as much as I do her, and if a scandal parts us it will kill her. Now I have made you a handsome offer: accept it or not as you please; but you shall not visit my errors upon an innocent girl who has never harmed you——"

"You love her!" echoed Margaret, with a bitter accent of jealous wrath; and she rose, quivering all over, and confronted her husband. "Well, then, let her judge between us."

"What does this mean? Do you think I am going to let you pour out your abuse of me into Miss Graham's ear?"

"I shall not abuse you. I only want Miss Graham to decide whether I am your wife or not. If she be content to marry you after she has heard my story I will withdraw."

"You must be mad to suggest such a thing."

"Mad! oh, that is a word I have heard pretty often of late, and God knows you have done enough to make me so," ejaculated Margaret, with angry derision; "but I am not so mad, it seems, that you dare let me impeach you before the woman who you say loves you. As for you, you don't love her; if you did you would not deceive her. It is only her money you love."

"That is an unworthy calumny."

"There are some men whom nothing can calumniate. Anyhow, I would rather see you dead than married to this girl. Do you hear me, Colonel Forester, or Field, or whatever else your name is?"

Jealousy had flown to Margaret's head in a torrent. Never had a man so grossly erred as in using cold argument and choleric menace towards this woman who was all heart and nerves. Women are capable of the loftiest sacrifices, and Margaret might have been equal to the heroism of suffering Philip to marry her rival, provided he had concealed that he was in love, and had described his marriage simply as a thing of worldly prudence. It would have been a compensation to her for her abandonment and even for the crime of bigamy which she was sanctioning, that Philip's happiness was her work. She could still have cherished the idea that he secretly loved her, or at least respected and admired

her disinterestedness. But to be contemptuously paid off like a leman, and with a rival's money too,—to be told, she, the lawful wife, that she had no hold on her husband, and that his treatment of her was “handsome,”—this was a humiliation past enduring. It left her none of the honour of sacrifice, it gave her no salve for the outrage on her dignity as a woman, no indemnity for the dastardly ill-usage she had undergone. All love was now swept away from Margaret's heart and she hated Philip. How much more then did he detest her!

He mastered himself by an effort and consulted his watch.

“I will give you five minutes to make up your mind,” he said.

“Five minutes or five years will not alter my determination,” she answered, resolutely.

“You don't know what you are saying, Miss Hawthorne,” he replied, between his teeth. “Just listen to this: Your choice lies between accepting my proposal or being confined as a lunatic. Two doctors have certified you insane. It is not my wish to deal unkindly with you, but you have driven me to bay, and if you do not accept my offers I shall place you under control till you become reasonable.”

“To my life's end then,” cried Margaret, with defiance; “for if we both live a hundred years, Philip, you will find me upon your path, speaking as I do now. Ah! you threaten me—you who ought to be kneeling at my feet! But I have justice to wreak on others as well as you. I shall take no rest until I have brought *you* to reason and your cowardly accomplices to punishment. That is my last word!”

“Your last word, is it,” he echoed, pocketing his watch. “I had better give you another hour, for you are not in a fit state to reflect. Ah! take care!”

This exclamation was caused by Margaret's making a rapid movement towards the window, which she essayed to open. Darting forward, Philip caught her in his arms, drew her roughly back, and grasped her wrists.

“Stupid woman,” he muttered.

“Coward!” she retorted, panting and struggling to free herself. “Coward! let go of me, will you? How dare you hold me?” and writhing with her whole strength, she sprang out of his arms, dashed her muff through two panes of glass one after the other, and screamed wildly, “Murder! murder! they're killing me!”

Philip Forester, who was livid, seized her by the waist and swung her round with such violence that she was thrown on to the floor; then he darted from the room and bolted upstairs. Nat Riddel

and the sham Captain Field, who had been waiting within call, hurried in, and the latter lifted his supposed wife whilst the other returned to the landing and shouted to the two women below to come upstairs.

When Margaret, who was partially stunned, recovered her feet she saw herself in the embrace of a black-bearded man, who caressed and besought her with words of extravagant marital endearment, calling her his darling wife, his dear.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed, like one who dreams. "Are you tipsy? Take your hands off me, sir. Where is Colonel Forester?"

"Hush, my poor dear," cried the rascal, pawing her and clasping her round the waist, to prevent her from repeating her escapade.

Bridget and Jemima, who now entered, added their expostulatory voices to his, and exclaimed at the sight of the broken windows. But Margaret, not divining into what infernal ambush she had fallen, recoiled from what she conceived to be the assault of a drunken brute and continued to call for Colonel Forester.

"But there is no Colonel Forester, it's all a delusion of yours, my poor darling. Oh dear, dear, this fit fell upon her all of a sudden," wailed Captain Field, addressing the two women. "We had been talking for an hour quite peaceably, and I almost thought she was cured, when all at once and without a word of warning she jumps up and screams for Colonel Forester!"

"It's the poor lady's nerves that are fidgeting her," remarked Bridget, soothingly, and taking the patient in a motherly way by the arm. "Quiet yourself, my deary, nobody's a-going to hurt you."

"Great God, you *will* all make me mad between you if this goes on," ejaculated Margaret, frantically. "Mrs. Packram, will you tell me who that man is?"

"There, there, she doesn't know her own husband now," exclaimed Captain Field, dolorously, uplifting his hands.

"You surely know your dear husband, don't yer?" smirked Bridget, who took Margaret's vacant stare for a symptom of dementia beyond question.

"My husband!" raved Margaret, standing for a moment stock-still. "Then it seems you are all in league against me. By whose orders are you acting? Stand back, I say—I'll call for help and rouse up all the people of the quarter against you."

She made another plunge at the window, but Dr. Sprottle's servants were too adroit for her. Quick as a Chilian throws a lasso, Bridget flung a shawl over her head, and, jerking it sharply back at the risk of cricking her neck, made her lose her balance and dragged

her to the floor heavily. Then she knelt down beside her, and wrenching the ends of the shawl round so that the patient's head was imprisoned and constrained to gasp for breath, she called to her companion. "Now quick, Jemima, out with the strait-waistcoat."

"Oh, don't hurt her, please don't hurt her!" lamented Captain Field.

"No, sir, it's all for the poor lady's good. She'll be meek as a lamb in a moment. Quick there."

Jemima, who had brought up the carpet-bag with which she had travelled, drew from it the article in request. A strait-waistcoat is a jacket of strong canvas which opens and laces up behind, and is provided with sleeves two yards long, closed at the extremities and terminating with a piece of rope. When the patient's arms are in the sleeves the garment is laced with whipcord, then the arms are drawn across the chest, and, the ends of the sleeves being pulled behind, are tied so tight as to preclude movement. No pain is caused by this garment, except when, from vicious cruelty or carelessness, the tightness is pushed to the extent of contracting the chest, and rendering the shoulders incapable of playing in their sockets.

The practised hands of the two asylum women had soon clothed Margaret in this attire of helplessness. Half stifled, she twisted and kicked during the operation, so that her supposed husband was obliged to kneel and hold her by the ankles. However, Jemima produced a pair of padded leather shackles, which, strapped over the tops of the boots, and linked to each other by an iron chain six inches long, put it out of the patient's power, once she stood on her feet, to walk faster than a tortoise crawls.

While these things were being done Nat Riddel had slunk downstairs to open the street door and reassure the few inquisitive persons who had collected on hearing the breakage of glass to know what the matter was. The statement that there was a certified lunatic in the house, who was to be removed to an asylum by-and-by, sufficed to disperse them all, a policeman included. On his return to the drawing-room the detective found that Margaret was as quiet as Mrs. Puckram had promised, for she had been lifted on to the sofa and had swooned there. The women were burning a quill pen under her nostrils.

"I am afraid the poor lady is badly ill," said Bridget, "and it would be dangerous to leave her in this house."

"I think so too," remarked Nat Riddel, and he hobbled upstairs to confer with Colonel Forester, whom Edward Jasper had already joined.

"It's of no use trying to make her hear reason," said Forester, who was ashy pale, and wiped some blood off a scratch on his hand. "I made her a good offer enough."

"Five hundred a year, sir; I should think any female ought to be glad of that. It's playing the gentleman," respectfully muttered Nat Riddel, who meant what he said.

"No, she wants to create a fuss," said Forester; "she must be removed to Dr. Billing's asylum. I hope a short stay there will make her tractable. Meanwhile, you will have to remain here, Jasper."

"Yes, sir," said the old soldier, understanding from a rapid look of his master that he was required to keep an eye on Captain Field and Riddel.

"Scadding has left London?" asked Forester, in a lower tone, so that the detective could not hear.

"Yes, sir; I saw him off by the steamer from London Docks this morning."

"Good; I shall not return to Fairdale for a couple of days, and you will hear from me to-morrow. Now go and see that the staircase is clear, so that neither of those women may see me leave the house."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

At Ivy House, where the Tabors lived, one day followed another in tranquil monotony, and the Crossbridge accident only disturbed that quietude for a few weeks. When the victims had been buried, and the coroner's jury had returned the customary verdict that no one was to blame, the place lapsed into its old peacefulness. Dr. Tabor unexpectedly obtained an appointment as surgeon to the Blackbridge Union in acknowledgment of his services towards the injured, and as this put a great deal of local practice into his hands, he renounced his intention of returning to France as a surgeon of the Red Cross Society. Mr. Vigus was looking for a curacy, but as his face was still covered with sticking-plaster, vicars were backward in employing him. Dr. Tabor wished him to remain at Ivy House, but the curate, being loth to abuse the hospitality of his friends,

retired to lodgings in the village. However, he saw the Tabor every day, and for want of better occupation played at hide-and-seek with the children, or took long walks with Isaac Hawthorne, attended by his dog Touzel.

No clue had been discovered as to the authors of the burglary, and it was taken for granted by the doctor and his wife that the housemaid Ruth must have had some hand in the affair. She had been dismissed, there being insufficient evidence to prosecute her, even if the Quaker had not been averse to such modes of exacting vengeance. The old man, for his part, did not believe Ruth guilty, and he had a theory that when the Almighty envelopes a crime in mystery, it is that He does not wish men to probe it, but reserves the judgment of it for His own special tribunal.

But the disappearance of Sybil Hawthorne's portrait had the effect of drawing the bereaved parents' thoughts towards their absent child with an anxiousness greater than before. It grieved them sadly to have lost this last memorial of her. They had always mourned her departure, but now it seemed to them that it was their duty to try and ascertain her whereabouts. Mr. Hawthorne was old, and the railway accident reminded him of how uncertain is human life. He was possessed of a funded income, which at his death he wished to leave in equal shares to his wife and two daughters; and his lawyers had suggested more than once that he ought at least to assure himself that his child was alive. The hope that Sybil might write of her own accord had hitherto prevented him from taking any steps in this direction, and perhaps he was insensibly influenced by the pride of his wife, who thought it was for Sybil to make the first advance towards a reconciliation.

This was also Violet Tabor's opinion. She was not less anxious about her sister, but held that Sybil's long silence argued a want of natural affection or of sense very culpable. She must know what pangs her parents were suffering from the miserable suspense, and if it was the fear of not obtaining their forgiveness which withheld her from writing, this again was proof of an arrogant spirit, for she had no business to believe that their hearts would be callous to the outpourings of a true repentance. Violet judged with the rectitude of a pure-minded woman, who cannot conceive that there may be a shame worse than fear to check a Prodigal Daughter's return. Nevertheless, when her father and mother grew dismal with conjectures as to whether poor Sybil might not be dead, she melted and agreed to the proposal for inserting an advertisement in the papers. After this it became a question as to how this appeal should be drawn up, and whether it ought to be published in the *Times* or in

American journals. Dr. Tabor was rather for consulting a private inquiry office.

In quiet families action is not taken quickly. A proposal is turned over in many lights, and days are spent in forming a resolution. Dr. Tabor said he would ascertain which was the safest inquiry office, and ask about the best and cheapest way to trace a missing person. The truth is, he thought his wife's sister had gone wrong, and he would have preferred that Violet and her parents should remain in doubt as to her fate sooner than acquire a certainty which might cast a shadow over their lives. Sybil, as he remembered her, was a light-hearted girl, very worldly and coquettish. She used to call him "Jo," and twit him when he was courting her sister. After his marriage, when she came on visits to Ivy House, Violet used to lecture her about her flightiness, and then she would take him for a confidant of her troubles, declaring that scolding and Quakerism were making her life grievous. She was prettier than Violet, and could do clever things with her hands—sketch, embroider, play the piano, and make artificial flowers out of muslin or paper. She was always tastefully dressed, and spent her pin-money on ribbons or on presents, for she was generous, and a bank-note, when she had one, seemed to burn a hole in her pocket. Dr. Tabor used to think her a charming girl, but he was not astonished when she eloped, and he would not have been surprised to hear now that she was starrng it about the New World as an actress or as the unwedded companion of a gay adventurer. Calling her characteristics to mind as he drove about in his gig among the ten parishes of his Union, he mentally compared her to one of those brilliant mocking-birds that are not meant to live in a cage. He did not think that she could be dead or in distress. Rather was she enjoying herself, for his experience of natures like hers was that when they are on the point of death they write maudlin letters to the friends they have offended, or if pinched by adversity they come running home dishevelled, to tell pathetic fibs and wheedle money out of their relatives to freight them for a new career of extravagance. Joseph Tabor had not seen enough of his sister-in-law to detect the hidden moral strength which ran through her character, like a vein of gold through clay.

He was an affectionate husband who had struggled hard to win professional renown, and shrank from seeing any elements of shame introduced into his little home to mar its peace. Perhaps because he had more talent than most young doctors, and would not stoop to the charlatanry by which patients can be allured, he had found it very hard to establish a practice. Luckily he had some private

means, and a wife who understood housekeeping, and a settled will to get on. The impulse which had driven him to confront the dangers of the Franco-German war in the service of the ambulance corps was one of ambition as much as philanthropy. It had helped to make his name known; and his exertions after the railway accident had added to his local reputation. Now it looked as if he had got his foot in the stirrup. Oddly, but naturally enough, Violet counted that Colonel Forester might assist her husband's worldly advancement in requital for his attendance on Mr. Johnson; and it seemed that she was right, for this personage showed himself not ungrateful of what had been done for "his servant." One evening, about a fortnight after "Mr. Johnson's" departure, as Dr. Tabor returned with a dripping waterproof from a round of visits in the rain, Violet met him in the hall with a beaming face, and announced that the station-carrier had brought a box containing a beautiful silver claret-jug, and "Oh, such a nice letter from Colonel Forester, begging that the doctor would accept this little token of gratitude for his kindness." The claret-jug was certainly worth fifty guineas, and, together with the courteous note, constituted a gift of the kind which people call princely, probably because princes receive such more often than they give them. Nothing could have been better calculated to impress an agreeable recollection of the donor, and such was Philip Forester's object.

This episode diverted the conversation from poor Sybil that evening. Sitting round the table after tea within the luminous circle of a moderator lamp,—while Violet and her mother worked crochet, and the two children were playing at their grandfather's knee,—the family debated whether Joseph Tabor ought to go to Fairdale to thank Colonel Forester, or whether a simple letter would do. It was decided that a letter would suffice, and the doctor wrote it there and then in polite terms, devoid of obsequiousness. Violet remarked that she had from the first liked Colonel Forester, and appealed to her father as to whether there was not something very winning in his voice. Mr. Vigus, who had come in after tea, observed, after inspection of the claret-jug, that it must be a pleasant thing to be one of Colonel Forester's servants, since he set so much store by their health.

"Now it never occurred to my last bishop to send you a silver tea-pot for setting me on my legs," added he, laughing.

"I should be better pleased if he were to present you with a living," said Violet, with a smile.

"A curacy would do if the work were pleasant and the salary exorbitant," replied Peter Vigus.

"The Lord will send thee work in His vineyard when He hath need of thee, friend Vigus, but He will not bestow on thee an exorbitant salary," said the Quaker, seriously.

"What I like about Colonel Forester is his gentleness," remarked Mrs. Hawthorne, whose active fingers plied the crochet pins as actively as her daughter's. She worked without spectacles, and looked across the table every now and then to smile at her grandchildren.

"I should think he must be kind to all women," proceeded Violet; "how considerate he was to Ruth; a word from him was enough to make her cry when she had held out defiantly against us all."

"Nay, he touched the spring of feeling in the girl's heart and it gushed forth, for she had been unjustly accused," said the Quaker.

This gave a turn to the conversation. Mr. Vigus took up a sheet of paper and a pencil and began to draw. Violet observed that she could have acquitted Ruth if anything had been stolen but that picture. Why should an ordinary burglar have laid hands on a family portrait unless he had learned from some one in the house that it was esteemed a thing of value?

"You know, papa, you used to dust it every morning with your own hands, and that may have excited remark."

"Yea, I dusted it with my own hands," said the Quaker, "and I cannot think the Lord hath deprived me of this daily labour of love without some good purpose. He perhaps intendeth to send back Sybil herself now that her image is gone from us."

"I pray it may be so, dear," said Mrs. Hawthorne, with a quiet sigh.

"He doeth nothing but for our good, and if His right hand chasteneth His left maketh whole," added the Quaker. "Friend Vigus, art thou drawing Lucy's portrait?"

"I am trying. Sit still, please, Lucy," said the parson, addressing the little brown-eyed mite of four, who was seated on her grandfather's knee turning over a picture-book, and who instantly became grave after the manner of children.

"I want my pottet too," said little Isaac, aged three, whose chin just reached to the table.

"You shall have one in your turn, my six foot friend. Here a little shading for the eyes, now two touches for the dimples. I think that's it," exclaimed Peter Vigus, displaying his performance. "But I say, Mrs. Tabor, have you noticed how very like Lucy is to your sister, as the missing portrait showed her?"

"Why, this is the very image of Sybil!" ejaculated Violet, laying down her work.

"Let me see, my dear," faltered the Quaker, stretching out his hand.

Joseph Tabor looked up from the newspaper, where he had just been reading the report of Captain Field's application on the previous day to have his wife Margaret released on bail. He examined the sketch, and bade Lucy turn her face to the light. Pleased at becoming an object of attention, the child smiled, and it was Sybil's smile all over.

"Yes, the resemblance is striking," acknowledged the doctor.

"Oh, Joseph, how came we never to observe it before?" exclaimed Violet, gazing at her child. "Lucy, dear, do you hear? You are the very image of your aunt!"

"Is aunty as little as me?" asked Lucy, wondering.

"Mamma, will aunty tum to see us toon?" asked little Isaac.

"Yes, dear, if you are very good."

"And will she bring us plenty toys?" proceeded the youngster, with an eye to business.

"Yes, plenty of toys, dear."

Dr. Tabor had left his place and stood near the fire meditatively. The discovery that his child was like Violet's erring sister touched the fatherly fibre in his heart. Sybil became dearer in his sight from that moment for little Lucy's sake, and because it is not in a father to think evil of a woman who may have been once like what his child is, and who may be now like what that child will be in a few years.

"I will write to-morrow to an inquiry office," he said suddenly.

"Oh, please do, Joseph," begged Mrs. Hawthorne, who was examining the sketch with glistening eyes. "I am afraid we have wasted too much time already."

"Let us seek and we shall find her," remarked the Quaker, reverently. "Truly God was in our midst and heard my prayer, when I said that if He had taken our daughter's image it was to bring us a greater consolation. See how the spirit forthwith descended into friend Vigus to guide his pencil."

"I will try and make a better sketch," said the parson. "It was a kind of fluke that I caught the likeness so well this time."

"These are not flukes, friend; it was God's own hand leading thee," replied the Quaker, mildly, as he shook his head. "But now it is time for our evening prayers."

At Ivy House family prayers were held at a quarter to eight, so that the children might be present at them before going to bed.

When the servants had been summoned, and the household knelt round the table, the little ones beside their mother, and the Quaker near his wife, Isaac Hawthorne besought Heaven with exceeding earnestness for the return of his daughter. It was the first time that he had thus prayed for her in the hearing of the servants :—
“ O God, Thou knowest how we have mourned for her in our hearts although our tongues were silent. Pour now Thy grace upon her, that like as the wandering bird returns to her nest, and the little lambs to their fold, she may seek the home where love awaits her, and pardon if she needs it, poor, suffering child ! Send her to gladden our declining years, O Lord, even as Ruth confronted Thy servant Naomi ! ”

Whilst her father was making supplication for her, and whilst her mother and sister sobbed responsive, Sybil Hawthorne was raising to Heaven a piteous cry for a deliverer.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DE LUNATIOO.

THEY were taking her to a private mad-house. But she did not suffer herself to be removed to this place without making every effort in her power to get herself rescued. She screamed in the cab that was bearing her away, in the hope of attracting the passers-by ; and she addressed frenzied appeals to the cabman, who only drove the faster. The certificate was enough to cut off the patient from all human assistance. The law confers upon any couple of doctors a power not granted to the highest judges—that of consigning a person to unlimited captivity, after a private judgment, virtually irresponsible.

Margaret had been carried into the cab with her strait waistcoat on (though it was concealed by her cloak), and all she gained by her refractoriness was that on her arrival at the asylum, which was in the south-west district, summary measures were at once taken with her. In a meanly-furnished room, lighted by a candle in a wire lantern, padlocked, she was undressed by Bridget and Jemima, put to bed, and tied. The place, from what she could see of it in the dark, had spacious grounds and bare trees. A great many doors were unlocked and then locked again. Captain Field, who had accompanied her in the cab, left her in the front hall to go and

she speak with a Dr. Billing, who owned the asylum, and she was left alone with the maids, who hurried her as fast as her shackled feet could walk through a number of courts and passages, from some of which she heard moans and wild laughter issue. Then she was half dragged up a narrow, dirty staircase without a carpet, at the top of which a pock-marked woman appeared to light them with a tallow candle. A few steps more and she found herself in an evil-smelling room, infinitely dingier than the prison cell where she had been living.

It was dingier and fouler. From the iron bed came an unclean odour, as if patients in their second childhood had been sleeping there. The deal floor had not been scrubbed for weeks; there was a fireplace with a rusty iron grating, locked, in front, and nothing else in the way of furniture but a rush-bottomed chair and a small deal table screwed to the floor. The lantern gave out just enough light to show that the one window was protected outside by a wire netting which filled up the whole frame, evidently to prevent patients from jumping out.

In this room Margaret was undressed by Bridget and Jemima, put to bed, and tied up there on her back. No tenderness was shown her, for asylum attendants hate a troublesome lunatic, and act roughly when there is no one to look on.

"Only to think that you should have given us all this precious bother, you silly thing," said Mrs. Puckram, as she pulled off the patient's clothes like so many rags.

"You'll have to be 'ave yourself here, I can tell yer; we don't stand no tricks from the likes of you," added Jemima, snapping a stay-lace which had got knotted.

"But don't pull my hair in that way—you're hurting me," complained Margaret, who staggered helpless between the rude handling of the pair.

"Tut, tut, you're too fond of the gab, you are; come, bear a hand, Jemmy, and lift her into the bed."

When Margaret was in bed, strait-waistcoated,—for the grievous garment, after being taken off her dress, had been replaced over her chemise,—her arms, instead of being crossed over her chest, were drawn down beside her body, and the long sleeves were lashed taut to rings in the frame-work of the bedstead. A couple of straps, fastened to other rings, were buckled to the shackles round her ankles; and two more straps at the head of the bed were passed through leather contrivances on the shoulders of the canvas jacket, and kept the upper part of her body tightly down. Margaret lay on her back in the most uncomfortable of postures for sleeping, and

unable to stir hand or foot. A knot, produced by the clumsy tying of the ends of whipcord which laced up the jacket, pressed on the small of her waist and caused her agonies. She begged that this knot might be untied, but the women did not so much as answer her; they were talking about their suppers as if she were not present, and soon left the room, withdrawing the light and double-locking the door.

Jemima returned at the end of an hour alone, and made preparations for going to rest in a closet contiguous to the patient's chamber. Margaret had been thrown into a profuse perspiration by her motionless posture, and she was parched by an intolerable thirst. She prayed for a glass of water.

"Hold your noise; you'll get water enough to-morrow when they gives yer the shower-bath," was the answer that came from Jemima, who was huddling off her clothes; but when Margaret repeated her prayer, the girl marched up to her bedside with nothing on but her smock, and her hair tumbling down her back. "Look'ee here, you'd best keep quiet, or you'll get more from me than pr'aps you'll like!" she said, energetically. "There are some of you loonatics as fancy you can kick up all the bobbery you please; but don't you try that on with me. I acts fair to them as be'aves right with me, but I mean to 'ave my night's sleep, so I tell you."

Margaret thought they could do no worse to her than had been done already, and gave way to piteous sobbing; but Jemima, who had deferred composing herself on her pillow until she could make sure of not being disturbed, sprang out of bed with a determination to stop "all that." It was the custom of this female (and she had found it answer by repeated experience) to give her noisy charges a good "bouncing" on their first night, so that they might keep quiet afterwards. She began by dashing the contents of a glass of water into Margaret's face, saying, "You want water—take it!" After this she climbed on to the bed, and kneeling on the patient's body, executed three jumps, which would have been enough to stave in her victim's ribs had the latter been lying on a hard surface; as it was, this piece of savagery knocked all the breath out of Margaret's body. Jemima wound up by fetching a man's cotton nightcap and drawing it completely over the patient's face as far as the chin, so that breathing became perforce hot and difficult; then, having but an inert, trembling body to deal with she inflicted a pair of terrific cuffs which made Margaret's ears sing for the next half-hour. Satisfied at having administered a lesson which would bear fruit, Jemima returned to her couch and was soon asleep, snoring like a cow.

Of the sensations of that night of horrors no description could

give an idea. In the morning there were fresh tortures. As soon as Jemima was up she went to fetch Mrs. Puckram, who was the head attendant of the "Ladies' Division," as it was called, and the two proceeded to dress Margaret—that is to say, they unfastened her straps, made her sit on the bed, and Jemima, with a piece of flannel smeared with yellow soap, scrubbed her face like a baby's. Margaret was so worn out by fatigue and fright that she offered no resistance; her voice was hoarse and she shook like an aspen. She submitted to be roughly dried with a towel which Jemima Horris had first used for her own ablutions, and to be combed as a monkey might comb a barber's block. When her toilet was over she was transferred to an arm-chair, strait-waistcoated, and her feet still shackled, for Mrs. Puckram decided that she would not trust her with her limbs free before the doctor had ordered her a bath. This was the third or fourth time Margaret heard the "bath" alluded to, and she wondered—dimly, as a dazed person can wonder—how a bath could be expected to have such great effects on her.

At eight o'clock a distant bell sent Jemima scurrying off to fetch breakfast. She came back with a pint jug of weak tea ready mixed with milk and brown sugar, and two slices of stale bread sparingly buttered. These she forced Margaret to swallow to the last drop and the last crumb, poking the food into her mouth in big hunks, and ordering her to slope her head back so that the tea—which luckily was tepid—might be poured down her throat more easily. This process causing some of the liquid "to go down the wrong way" as people say, brought on a fit of coughing and choking, which elicited from Jemima the jocular comment that the worst of babies "was the grown-up ones." But on Margaret's faintly remonstrating that it hurt her to eat, the girl waxed brutal again, and said, "When they take the jacket off yer you'll eat or leave what yer like, but while yer 'ave it on my orders is that you swallows your vittles, and you *shall*."

Margaret's chair was next wheeled near the window, and she was told to sit still there until ten o'clock, when the doctor would come round. Jemima retired to get her own breakfast, but left word with the pock-marked attendant, whom Margaret had seen the night before, to keep an eye on the "new 'un." This person, a frowsy slut with a torn black cap, came in dragging a broom after her, and stared at Margaret without saying a word. Margaret's eyes were half closed, but every time she opened them she saw through the wire-work before the window two mad women moving about in a garden about twenty yards square, planted with a few bare lilac-trees. The one walked round and round unceasingly with strides like a

man, and seemed to be talking to herself aloud; the other, who, despite the cold weather, had no gown, but only a brown flannel petticoat and a printed cotton jacket, was picking up handfuls of pebbles and piling them into her broken straw hat.

Margaret had arrived so late the night before that she had not been able to see much of her new place of torment as they bore her through the grounds; but the room in which she sat and the things she had already suffered, the sight of that bare garden and of those crazy women, formed a sufficiently rapid initiation into the horrors of Dr. Billing's private asylum.

Dr. Billing and Dr. Sprottle were partners. The law says that a certificate of insanity must be signed by a practitioner who is not in any way connected with the asylum to which the patient is to be removed, but this provision is made void by the practice of medical men receiving fees for the patients whom they commit to the houses of their colleagues. For every lunatic whom Dr. Sprottle sent to Dr. Billing he received so much, his commission being calculated on the amount that was to be paid for the patient's board, &c. On the other hand, whenever Dr. Billing was applied to for the address of an eminent physician who would undertake to sign a certificate, he recommended Dr. Sprottle. The two also played into each other's hands in the matter of consultations. When the relatives of a patient are very anxious to see him cured, and yet see no signs of amelioration, they often welcome the idea of a consultation; in such cases Dr. Billing always called in the eminent Dr. Sprottle, who, of course, never failed to say that he entirely approved of the treatment which Dr. Billing had followed. This treatment, for which relatives paid so expensively, generally consisted in doing nothing. Those who left Dr. Billing's hands cured might thank Nature for it.

When the pathology of madness becomes better understood there will be fewer private asylums than there are at present, and those which are suffered to remain will be very closely inspected. Persons reputed to be dangerous to society should be confined in places managed by the State or by responsible county authorities; they should not be consigned to private persons, who may have a pecuniary interest in retarding their recovery, or in detaining them after their cure. There are cases in which persons of wealth naturally desire to keep the mental derangement of a relative secret, and it may be conceded, though not too positively, that in some of these cases a patient might be better cared for in a private house, managed by an able and conscientious physician, than in a public institution. But no patient should be detained in a private asylum

longer than a twelvemonth, unless it be by his own request, formulated at a moment when he is sufficiently convalescent, or lucid, to know what he is saying. The best authorities on insanity (Conolly in England, Esquirol in France) are agreed that if a mental disease be curable it can be cured in a year; if there be little or no improvement at the end of that time, it is a proof that the disease was beyond treatment, or that the physicians were incompetent to deal with it. In either case a removal to other hands can do the patient no harm, and may do him good. The mere fact of change is often beneficial. It has frequently happened that a patient's relatives having kept him in a private asylum as long as they could afford it, have been compelled for want of means to remove him to a county establishment, and that once here he has been promptly restored to health.

But if a patient be incurable there is an additional and very cogent reason why he should not be suffered to end his days in a private house. Humanity requires that the dismal life of a lunatic should be rendered as enjoyable to him as possible, and this is done in large asylums, where agricultural pursuits, music, seemly chapel services, and all sorts of in-door recreations, including the resources of a well-stocked library, are at the disposal of the poor maniac. Nor must the advantages of companionship with his fellows be overlooked, for the varieties of insanity are infinite, and the lunatic who talks constant gibberish, as well as the hypochondriac who shuns all society, are rare exceptions to the general rule. The monomaniac, who is rational on all points save one; the melancholic, whose periods of insanity are intermittent, and who in the intervals is perfectly lucid; the epileptic, who is also between his falling fits as sane as most men; the harmless idiot, and the patient who is passing through the first phase of general paralysis (usually a gushing, talkative phase), all keenly crave after conversation and amusement; and it is an absolute cruelty to keep them cooped up in a small asylum, where they are left to divert themselves as they may in a narrow garden, under the eyes of sulky keepers, and with no other event to relieve the monotony of their lives from week to week, and year to year, but the occasional visits of their friends. If this book should fall into the hands of a person having a hopelessly insane relative confined in a private asylum, he is exhorted to remember that public asylums are not only much cheaper than the others, but are also conducted with a sole view to the welfare of the inmates, instead of the enrichment of the private doctors; and that, moreover, patients who, after passing through private madhouses, have been transferred to such institutions as St. Luke's or Earlswood are

unanimous in preferring the latter beyond comparison. It is not contended here that all public asylums are well managed, but they all might be so. Supervised by magistrates, and readily accessible to visitors; governed by doctors who have fixed salaries, and who are generally actuated by a professional ambition to cure their patients, as well as by a humane wish to relieve their hard lot so far as in them lies; officered, moreover, by staffs of keepers over whose acts the number of the patients, many of them intelligent, exercises a moral control, public asylums can be made to offer every guarantee of good order, comfort, and kindness; whereas private asylums cannot.

As the law at present stands, almost any man can set up a private mad-house as a speculation, if he only get it licensed in the name of a doctor. Some mad-house proprietors advertise in the papers like cheap boarding-house keepers, others pay numerous doctors to puff them, and their speculation is no bad one if it brings them plenty of well-paying lunatics, whom they may neglect, half-starve, and otherwise ill-use without any fear of punishment. To be sure, inspectors come on periodical visits, but they only see things superficially; into the private abuses of the place their eye cannot pierce. If a patient prefers a complaint of cruelty or of being stinted, half a dozen servants are called to give him the lie, and the inspector cannot but believe the six sane people rather than the solitary mad one. Complaints to relatives are equally useless, and if it were not for the ugly stories of broken ribs and unaccountable ruptures that come out occasionally on coroners' inquests, one might suppose that the alleged cruelties of the mad-house were evolved from the inner consciousness of the philanthropists who have so repeatedly denounced them. Unfortunately, the public mind is so imbued with error as to the unmanageable character of lunatics, that coroners' juries are very apt to be misled by the plausible statements of mad-house doctors as to the injuries which furious maniacs inflict upon themselves. They forget that the injuries which a madman inflicts upon himself argue at the best a culpable negligence in those who are paid to control him, but as a fact lunatics do *not* break their own ribs, and if juries would return a verdict of manslaughter against somebody every time that a dead lunatic's body bore marks of violence, these forms of "self-injury" would soon cease.

The conclusion of these occasional remarks is that private asylums for the temporary treatment of curable brain diseases may be tolerated, like other private hospitals, subject to proof of the undoubted medical skill of those who conduct them; but private asylums for the perpetual detention of the insane should no more be

allowed than private prisons. Recollecting how helpless a creature a lunatic is,—how repulsive often, how essentially deserving of forbearance and pity,—and remembering, too, what a propensity there is in human nature when education has not refined it to tyrannize over the weak, it is not too much to ask that confirmed maniacs should be placed under the same enlightened protection as guards criminals in gaols and convict establishments. It would be considered a monstrous thing to commit the custody of men and women under a life-sentence to a number of private speculators, subject to no other supervision but the brief visit of an inspector once in three months. Explicit rules, frequent magisterial inspections, and impartial investigations into all complaints by governors who have no interest in promoting abuses, ensure to the prisoner proper food, warmth, and clothing, and shield him against the oppression of warders. Surely the lunatic has as strong a claim on public sympathy as the felon!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

COLD-WATER CURE.

HOWEVER, of mad-houses there are many kinds. Some, which receive none but very wealthy patients, are good; others are reported to be so because their owners have made themselves a name in the world by pushing methods. Dr. Billing's had existed for years, and had about seventy patients. Some paid 8*l.* a month, others 20*l.*, one or two who were exceptionally treated as much as 100*l.*, for there were three classes. Dr. Billing having a number of noisy friends (who had never enjoyed the advantage of being patients in his house), was believed to be a philanthropist, who conducted his establishment on paternal and liberal principles.

He had the soft, shambling ways of the turtle. A bulky white head partially bald, and not unlike a dead calf's scalded; a smooth-shaven face, with dewlaps of flesh overhanging the hinder parts of his jaws; a treble chin buried in the folds of a white cravat, which went thrice round his neck and was finely starched; a wide mouth full of jagged discoloured teeth, and thick lips always wet with unctuous words and smiles; a tall figure and stooping shoulders; hands warm and moist as boiled turnips—such was the man. He

dressed like a rich Low-Church clergyman of thirty years ago—with a frock-coat, an open dress waistcoat, showing all his shirt-front and three cornelian studs; he wore a gold chain that went round his neck, black gloves always glossy, and a hat perennially new, lined with silk and speckless white leather. A stout, gold-headed walking-stick completed his out-door rig.

He was the delight of lunatics' relatives, to whom he exhibited his magnificent private grounds, where they fondly imagined the insane were allowed to roam, but he never showed them the dreary yards where some of his patients had been pining for more than twenty years. He seemed to have the proverbial love of kind-hearted men for animals, and the private part of his house abounded in parrots, bird-cages, and pet dogs; he would also remark with touching simplicity, "Mrs. Billing and I have no children—we look upon our patients as our family."

He gave frequent dinners to literary men and barristers, who rewarded his hospitality by referring eulogistically to him in the press, or by calling him as an "expert" at criminal or divorce trials. Experts generally give the evidence they are paid to give,—it may be only a coincidence between their convictions and the facts, but it is an invariable coincidence,—and Dr. Billing differed not from other experts. Like Dr. Sprottle, he would have sworn Solomon mad by arguing that the Book of Ecclesiastes revealed symptoms of a morose, hypochondriacal spirit.

Drs. Billing and Sprottle, though friends and partners, did not like each other. Each had his curative hobbies: the former being a partisan of the old methods of treating the insane—that is, leaving them to themselves; the latter being addicted to all novel scientific experiments—electricity, bromide of potassium, chloral, and cold water. Each would have confined and strait-waistcoated the other without compunction if the occasion had offered; for Sprottle thought Billing evinced many a token of intellectual decay, while Billing had an idea that Sprottle would end his days howling mad from over-conceit. However, Sprottle being more abreast with the notions of the age, Billing was obliged to adopt many of his suggestions for fear of losing his patronage, but he did so shrugging his shoulders.

When Dr. Billing came to see Margaret he brought Dr. Sprottle with him. He made a low bow to her as if she had been in her own drawing-room, and in a honeyed phrase inquired if she had passed a good night? Dr. Sprottle merely nodded, and in the most cock-a-doodle-doo way began talking of the patient and her disease, as if she were out of hearing. Margaret looked silently at Dr. Billing

during this verbiage to read on his fat face whether there was any chance of his believing her story. She was prepossessed by his benevolent manner, and fancied that if he would sit down and converse with her an hour alone he would soon see how rational she was, and not only take the strait-waistcoat off her, but set her free. However, to try him she complained of the brutal treatment she had received from Jemima.

This girl, who was standing by, lifted her hands and uttered vehement denials.

"Oh, mum, how can you say I ill-used you? Why, sir, I sat by her bedside all night; the poor lady was fractious, and said she couldn't bear to be left alone."

"I wonder you are not ashamed to tell such untruths," exclaimed Margaret, confounded by such audacity. "You jumped upon me with your knees and boxed my ears."

"Oh, mum, the idea! Don't you remember you kept asking me for water?"

"And you refused to give me any. You threw a glassful into my face."

"Hark to that now!" ejaculated Jemima. "Why, sir, if I gave the lady one glass to drink I gave her at least half-a-dozen."

"You acted wrong there; a mouthful at a time is enough in these fevers," crowed Dr. Sprottle, dictatorially. He laid one of his splay hands on Margaret's brow. "Hot and throbbing," said he. "Same indications as yesterday. In these cases of homicidal mania there is a constant propensity to accuse people of imaginary crimes."

"Jemima is a very good girl, you will find," said Dr. Billing, addressing Margaret in his dulcet tones. "She has been with us for several years."

"Oh, but she is quite a different person when your back is turned," cried out Margaret in despair. "If I am to remain another day here I entreat you to give me a less brutal and untruthful servant."

"Oh, mum, this is too bad of you," whined Jemima. "Dr. Billing, sir, will you let me undress the lady? you'll see if there's a mark of blows anywhere about her."

"Hush, hush, enough of this!" interrupted Dr. Sprottle, with his magniloquent *cluck-cluck*. "Strong cerebral excitement, Billing; the lips dry, the cranium glowing like a furnace. You'd better give her a four hours' bath and a shower."

Margaret gave herself up for lost. She had encountered that absolute incredulity which meets all the statements of alleged

lunatics, and which is one of the most terrible aggravations of their lot. After this she felt that whatever spite might be wreaked upon her by servants would have to be borne without a murmur. Jemima stood by with a look of demure triumph. It is the regular practice of creatures like her to rebut complaints of assault with offers to let the patient be stripped and examined. But to have one's ears boxed or to be slapped like a child with the palm of the hand leaves no marks though it hurts.

The gallinaceous Dr. Sprottle mouthed out some more professional jargon, and Dr. Billing blandly told his patient that he would do everything to make her stay in his house agreeable. She prayed that the strait-waistcoat might be taken off her. He appealed by a glance to Dr. Sprottle, who answered curtly, "By-and-by, after the bath, if you're quiet." Upon this they both retired, Jemima ushering them to the door, and curtsying, like a well-trained serving-maid.

But when the two doctors were well out of earshot this raw-boned wench bounced back into the room, and poured upon Margaret a volley of abuse in the lingo of Billingsgate. She shook her clenched fist in her face, called her by every abominable name in the vocabulary of what is foul, and threatened to make her life a hell for her.

"Ah, you want to take the bread out of my mouth, that's your sort is it! Well, just wait until I get you into the bath-room, and then you'll see if I don't tame yer, my lady. I've 'ad as bad as you to deal with, and I've made 'em meek as kittens, and so I will you, you may bet your head on it. Just wait a bit; your bath 'll be ready in ten minutes."

There was evidently something very terrible in this bath. Margaret quaked at the name of it without being able to realize what it could portend. Of her abject terror and disgust in listening to Jemima's torrent of bestial invective it would be superfluous to speak. There is no language to paint the prostration of the senses under the savage hand of oppression. Indeed despair produces an artificial calm like the coma of the body after physical torture, and the predominant thought in Margaret's mind was curiosity as to what this threatened bath would be like.

She was soon to know. Sall, the pock-marked girl, came in to help Jemima, and the two between them half carried, half pushed the patient down-stairs across a small yard, and thence into a bath-room of sordid aspect. The atmosphere was chilly, for there were no heating pipes, and the white-washed walls were discoloured at their base with a damp mould, while the whole surface and the

ceiling was covered with blisters, which scaled off into a shower of lime-dust at the least touch. The floor was of red brick, but there was a board for the bather to step on in getting out of the bath. The bath was of tinned copper and three-parts full of tepid water.

The two women undressed Margaret, removed her shackles and her strait-waistcoat, and all the time Jemima scolded with raging violence. When the patient had been unclothed, the strait-waistcoat before being completely removed was drawn over her hands and twisted two or three times round, so that the hands were entangled in it. Then Jemima tucked her own sleeve above her elbow and abruptly said, "Now, my lady, before you step into the bath we're just going to pay off old scores. Hold her by the wrists, Sall; she's one of those that complain to the doctor; we'll just show her how much we care. And you, Mrs. Prison-Bird, just bear in mind that every time you peach upon us you'll get a 'iding as you're a-going to 'ave now. And you may complain till you're hoarse, nobody 'll ever believe you, so you'd better do as the others do, and if you want us to use you well, tell the doctor that you're mighty well pleased with us."

With the paleness of horror, Margaret sprang aside to avoid the blow that was levelled at her, but Sall held her fast, and being alone with these two strong-armed tormentors, she did not escape one slap of the terrible castigation which followed. With the palm of her large hand Jemima belaboured her on the shoulders, arms, back, and all over the body, never striking twice in the same place for fear of bruises, but making the punishment all the more severe by this merciless distribution of it. Margaret's shrieks for mercy, her sobs of anguish, her convulsive struggles to set herself free brought no one to her aid. It is no uncommon thing for maniacs to resist being put into a bath, and if Dr. Billing's ears had caught any echoes of the sickening noise, he would have remarked mildly, "A curious thing that horror which all violent patients have for cold water!"

Jemima desisted at last for want of breath, and because her own hand hurt her. There was the ferocious gleam of butchery in her eyes, and her animal malice was in no wise appeased by seeing that Margaret had a foam on her lips, and that all her flesh was quivering from pain.

"Loose her hands, Sall," she said, panting; "shove her into the bath, and clap the lid on her. As for you, my lady, you see I've been as good as my word. If you feel hot now the bath 'll cool you; you're to have four hours of it."

A hundred years ago it was the custom to flog lunatics as part of

their normal treatment. Prints exist of maniacs at Bedlam "having the devil whipped out of them," as it was then the fashion to call it, and Voltaire tells of a Chinaman who, having found the way to France, was shut up as a madman because he could not speak French, and scourged twice a week for two years, until the gift of tongues having been imparted to him—by the lashes as it was piously believed—he was discharged cured. In these days the approved method of calming, coercing, and punishing lunatics is by means of cold water, under the form of prolonged baths and violent showers. Poor Margaret, who was both beaten, bathed, and showered upon, might have devoted herself to a comparative study between the advantages of the old system and the new.

A bath of four hours' duration seems a strange ordeal to any one who thinks an hour's sojourn in tepid water long enough, but baths of six and even eight hours length are occasionally prescribed. The object is to appease the exuberant vitality of the furious maniac by weakening him; and this may be well enough when the patient has strength to spare, but what of those who are already weak, and who are condemned to a four hours' soaking as a punishment for being excited or uncivil? The bath, however, is a trifle compared to the shower or *douche*, which is a revival of a water torture well known in the middle ages. Administered to patients delirious from alcoholic or brain fever, it may be beneficial no doubt, and the fact that these sufferers rather enjoy it than otherwise is testimony enough in its favour; but, inflicted by way of penalty, as it constantly is, upon patients who have no medical need for it, it is a form of cruelty about which persons outside mad-houses know too little.

The effect of the protracted bath upon Margaret was to make her drowsy. She lay in the bath imprisoned by a wooden lid, which was clamped to the bath, and through which her head protruded by a semi-circular aperture. Had she been less prostrate in body, the constraint of holding her neck for four hours stretched in the same position must have made her frantic, but Nature mercifully sent her some fits of sleep. The water had chafed the hot smart of the blows she had received; the muscular distention which was produced at the end of an hour caused her an almost pleasing sensation of languor. Slumbering in snatches, waking up with but a hazy consciousness of where she was, and relapsing into soft dreams of grateful things, she lost her sense of the flight of time, and was surprised when Jemima returned and said brusquely, "You've done your four hours; now for the shower. Shut your eyes and hold your breath."

Saying this, and without another note of warning, she turned a cock in the wall. From a large round perforated nozzle (like that on a watering-pot), which was fixed to a pipe five feet above the bath, down came a cascade of water with indescribable force full on the patient's head. There was no escaping the rush. Margaret's head being pilloried, she could not move it half an inch to right or left. The flood as it dashed down on the summit of her crown rebounded a foot high in all directions, and her hair, driven flat down, *seemed* to be shredded away, and to leave a bald patch on the place where the torrent fell with a might only comparable to that of a hammer, and with a sensation which resembled branding with a hot iron. The strongest men are cowed and broken by this infliction. There is no possibility of screaming under it, for the rushing of water into the mouth, eyes, ears, and nostrils forces the patient to gasp for breath. The skull feels as if it was going to be dashed into pieces; the flesh on the neck and ears feels scorched and flayed; down the spine and along all the nerves to the tips of the feet shoot icy thrillings, as if every joint were stretched upon the rack. No man can bear a strong *douche* for more than three minutes, and one minute is generally enough to half drown the patient and make his head feel numb for the rest of the day.

Margaret was gratified by about two minutes of the torture, and, as a matter of course, was unable to get out of the bath without help after it. For the first ten minutes that follow a *douche* the head aches as if it would split, and there is neither sight in the eyes nor motive power in the limbs; the victim is fairly stunned and imbecilified.

"Well, how do you like it, my lady?" said Jemima, hoarsely, as she and Sall dried Margaret together. "You know now what you have to expect every time you kick up a rumpus. I think we can trust you without your strait-waistcoat now. I'll bet you don't feel game for fighting."

"I should like to go to bed," moaned Margaret, as soon as she could articulate a word.

"I desay you would, but you sha'n't," scoffed Jemima. "If you took your sleep now you'd lie awake to-night and bother me again. Just come and get your dinner, and then you'll walk about the garden to warm yourself. Bed-time 'll come at eight for you like the rest."

The dinner, which Margaret was forced to eat, consisted of a slice of tough, under-done mutton, luke-warm, with sodden potatoes, and a lump of treacle pudding. The meat was cut for her, and she had only a wooden spoon to eat it with. However, her hands were

free, and she gained that much by the bath. Jemima, who had stolen her dinner-beer, made no objection to her leaving the pudding untasted; and seeing her cheeks and lips livid with cold, allowed her to warm herself for ten minutes near the grated fire-place before turning her out into the cold north-east wind which was blowing in the garden. She even condescended to add a word of encomium on her present placable condition.

"Just you keep quiet as you are now," said she, "and you and I sha'n't quarrel. If you're reasonable they won't leave you long in this division; you'll go into the First, and find some as you can talk to."

"But how long am I going to remain here?" faltered Margaret, putting a question which is that of all patients confined in mad-houses.

"Oh, goodness knows, I don't. That cracked 'un as you see turning round and round in the garden there has been here twenty-five years, and the other one who was a-picking up pebbles this morning fifteen."

These are the sorts of consolations which the inmates of asylums get to facilitate their recovery. It may seem difficult to admit that a human being should sigh after a prison, and yet Tolminster Gaol seemed like a paradise to Margaret beside the place where she now was.

She walked about the garden for hours trying to warm herself. Besides the two maniacs she had seen from the window, there were four others crouching round a railed stove in a shabby ground-floor parlour and gibbering. The stench in this room was so abominable that Margaret could not venture beyond the doorway. She was in the division to which the worst cases were relegated: those of patients who were obstreperous, or in the last stage of general paralysis, which rendered them helpless and unclean as infants. Three of the women were past middle age, and in such drivelling condition that they did not even turn when Margaret looked in; but a younger woman, who was pretty well dressed, and had a mass of beautiful flaxen hair all uncombed, jumped up and asked her what her name was. Pock-marked Sall, who was sewing at the table, addressed her as "Mrs. Emily," and told her to keep quiet; but she followed Margaret into the garden and struck up an acquaintance with her. Her questions and remarks were not irrational, but she had lost all modesty, and said disgusting things, as if she took pleasure in no other form of conversation. Margaret learned presently from Jemima that this patient was a lady who had lost her senses in that horrible railway accident at Crossbridge,

where her only child had been killed. Her conversation was nothing unusual, for all mad women talk dirtily.

The long sleep which Margaret took that night reconciled *Jemima* to her. The girl was not cruel for the fun of the thing; she only liked to lead a quiet life, having no notion that a sane servant should be worried out of victuals and sleep by women whose brains were in a hash. Seeing Margaret quiet, she became civil, and made a laudatory report of her to Dr. Billing. It was three days, however, before Margaret was removed to a better division.

She spent her time as she could, and did everything she was told to do, for she had reasoned that it was useless to resist. *Jemima* lent her a copy of "*Robinson Crusoe*," and she read it with that concentrated attention and curious enjoyment which are derived from books by persons who read to drive thoughts away. Every time she went into the garden she was pestered by Mrs. Emily; but she listened to her with pity, remembering the madness of *Ophelia*, who was not the less pure-minded because in her delirium she spoke words which put chastity to the blush. Doctors have often remarked that it is the most virtuous women who say the most repulsive things when their minds wander, and such things too that one marvels where they can have learned them. Mrs. Emily talked like an immoral woman who was slightly tipsy, and it was impossible to shake her off, for she clung with the tenacity of a dog to any one who did not repel her with threats. She did not care to be answered. Barely waiting to hear replies to the questions she put, she rattled off with an incessant, fatiguing garrulousness. Nevertheless, an instinct, which in mad people seldom errs, told this poor woman that Margaret was not insane. Lunatics never listen to one another with forbearance; the most cracked are quickest in discerning the cracks in the heads of their neighbours. After a couple of days of acquaintanceship, Mrs. Emily all at once asked, "Why are you here? You're no madder than I am!"

Sall, who stepped into the garden at times, endeavoured to draw away this patient by threatening her with a shower. She, too, had become civil, and told Margaret not to let herself be teased. Naturally she tendered no sort of apology for her brutality in the bath-room, but Margaret perceived that so long as she remained quiet she need fear no further molestation. Patience must be her rule. Remaining calm and amiable, she hoped she should end by convincing the doctors that she was in her right mind, and induce them to believe her story. As to what would happen when she was pronounced sane, whether she would be released without

further parley, or be taken back to prison to be tried, or be subjected to new persecutions, she had no means of guessing. She had lost the letter which she had written to Dr. Tabor (it had dropped out of her muff in the house at Soho), and she had no means of writing another, for writing materials were withheld from the patients. She was like a person in a fog, and could only wait until some of the mist cleared away of itself before she could see her way in any direction.

But on one point she was resolute : persecution should not make her recant one particle of the truth ; she did not repent having declined the insulting offer of a pension, and to the end of her life, whether she were in bonds or free, she meant to claim Philip Forester for her husband.

CHAPTER XL.

NEW PLOTS.

PHILIP was much depressed by the failure of his designs. He had made almost sure that he could persuade Margaret to accept his proposals, and now that he held her in confinement he did not know what to do with her. It was impossible to keep her in the asylum, for everybody would know of her being there ; and when the assizes came on Dr. Billing would be called upon to surrender her if her supposed husband did not do so. As it was Philip's determination that Margaret should not stand her trial, it became obvious that she must be removed to some place where she could be well hidden and so jealously guarded as to be unable to communicate with her friends. He had heard of French *maisons de santé* and Spanish convents where persons can be virtually entombed, but he preferred the idea of hiring a private house in France, and of consigning Margaret there in the custody of Edward Jasper and a pair of French female keepers. The public would think her husband had absconded with her beyond reach of justice ; there would be a nine days' talk about it, but then the affair would be forgotten. To carry out this plan the co-operation of Captain Field would be needed for a little while longer.

Philip had never spoken to this man, and did not mean to. On the morning after Margaret's transfer to Dr. Billing's, Edward Jasper

waited upon him at Limmer's Hotel, where he was staying, and in answer to his master's questions said that he thought the Captain was to be trusted.

"Do you know who he is?" inquired Philip.

"No, sir," replied Jasper, a little surprised. "Riddel mentioned that he had been unfortunate in business, that's all. He don't look as if he had been a soldier."

"Have you talked with him?"

"Not much, sir; he isn't one to talk. Riddel told me that you had promised the Captain five hundred pounds for this job, and that when the lady was out of prison you wouldn't want him any more."

"I find I shall want him a little longer. He will have to remove that woman to France, and you must go with them to keep watch over them both."

"Very well, sir."

"Once Mrs. Field is in France I shall leave her in your sole charge and in that of some women. It will be unnecessary that Captain Field should remain with you, but it will be very arduous work you will have in guarding the woman, so I warn you. Your wits must be continually on the look-out."

"Never mind that, sir."

"I need not say that you must show the wretched creature respect and kindness," continued Philip, "but don't let her slip from you. Remember that if she got loose she would ruin us both. When she has been kept a close prisoner for a year or so she may see the uselessness of struggling with me, and become manageable."

"I sha'n't let her slip, sir," answered Edward Jasper, significantly.

Later in the day Philip saw Nat Riddel at the house in Soho, and paid him the 500*l.* which had been agreed upon as Captain Field's fee, and also 1,000*l.* which the detective was to have for himself. This made 2,000*l.* which Nat Riddel had already received for his secret services; but one could not well grudge him the money, for he looked as if he should never have strength again to earn his bread by labour of an honest kind.

Was it the sense of his impotency which made him so eager to accept a new job—for more lucre, of course? He could do nothing without money. For another thousand pounds, half to himself and half to the Captain, he undertook to have Mrs. Field spirited out of the country. Philip thought these demands extortionate, and said so; but Riddel pointed out between his groans, for he was in constant pain, that this was the most ticklish affair in which

he had ever had a hand, and he had lost his health already, not to speak of coming risks. "You see, sir, our friend Field wants—oh (groan)—to get off to America as soon as possible, for if he was nabbed it wouldn't be a case of a few months in gaol merely; he might get penal servitude for life. To tell you the whole truth, he's a ticket-of-leave man, sir."

"Why have you mixed me up with such a person? You gave me to understand he was a detective like yourself," said Philip, with disgust and alarm, for this was news to him.

"Well, sir, I couldn't look about amongst honest men for one to do such a job as this," answered Riddel, with unintentional irony. "I had to find one who didn't mind what he did in a quiet way so long as he was well paid. His name is Harry Redwood. He got seven years for forgery whilst he was a bank clerk at Manchester, and now he's out on ticket-of-leave. A sharp fellow he is, sir, and pretty respectable,—oh!—as you've seen. He did this last job for us neatly. I was surprised myself to see him hugging and fondling Mrs. Field before those asylum women, just as if she was really his wife; and we may trust him in any future work, *whatever it is*. Oh! he'll be mum as the grave; much more so than any man who hadn't been a convict, for he knows what prison is, and doesn't want to be caught twice."

"Well, make your arrangements with the man," said Philip, who thought it useless to cavil. "How long will it be before you are ready?"

"We shall have to hire a lonely house in France; the country on the Norman coast might perhaps be best, sir," moaned Riddel; "and then two Frenchwomen as attendants, for they would be safer than Englishwomen. All that will take a fortnight, supposing Redwood leaves for France at once. But then we shall want passports. I forgot the passports."

Since the outbreak of the Franco-German war the passport system had been revived on the Continent. This would have presented no difficulty to ordinary travellers, but neither Riddel nor Redwood had bankers, or were acquainted with clergymen, magistrates, or doctors who could have served as "references," according to the Foreign Office rules. For obvious reasons Riddel could not ask his employers, the Messrs. Gehazi, to procure him a passport in Captain Field's name.

"Doesn't Redwood himself know of any respectable man?" asked Philip.

"He knows Mr. Pulman, sir; but we don't want the lawyer to

suspect that Mrs. Field is going to be removed to France ; and he'd guess it if Redwood asked him to get a passport."

"We can't be stopped by such a difficulty as this," said Philip, after a while. "I have an old passport of my own which would serve with a fresh visa, but that man will have to return it to me when he comes back."

"I'll see to that, sir. He's to travel as Colonel Forester, then?"

"Forester is a common name enough ; besides, no one will see the passport except the French police. I can't think of any other expedient for the moment. Let Redwood leave for France at once."

"I'll start him off as soon as I get the passport, sir."

"My marriage will take place in three weeks," said Philip, impressively. "I rely upon everything being done by that time, so that I may have no trouble afterwards."

"We'll see that you have no trouble, sir. I can answer for Redwood that he'll serve you well, *whatever you may ask of him.*"

Why did he repeat *whatever you may ask of him* ? The words had a ring of murder in them, as if the ticket-of-leave man would not have objected, for payment, to take Margaret away to some hiding-place and there kill her. Such, at least, was the construction which Philip put upon them, and the thought of his interest in Margaret's death haunted him all that day and through the night.

He had several things to do in London : he had promised Rose to go and visit some institutions for the blind, and to carry the afflicted inmates some donations for her. He had also to see several of his creditors and assure them that they should be paid immediately after his marriage. Meanwhile Frank Christy's leave had expired, and he had returned to Tolminster ; but his anxiety about Margaret was so great that he twice telegraphed begging Philip to report progress.

Here Philip hesitated. Should he tell Frank the truth, or lead him to believe that Margaret had accepted his conditions and gone away ? Frank had been so crusty and nervous of late that it was doubtful whether he would lend his sanction to the sequestration of Margaret. As his co-operation was no longer necessary for the new scheme in hand, Philip resolved to quiet his mind by hiding the truth. He wrote :—

"DEAR FRANK,

"Everything has gone off well. The offers have been accepted, and the bird has flown. All's well that ends well.

"Yours affectionately,

"Burn this."

"P. F"

On the day after sending this note Philip returned to Fairdale, having previously forwarded his passport to Nat Riddel, and had been assured that Harry Redwood would start for France as soon as he had got his visa. It was a Saturday, and he had no further business in town, besides which, he was wanted at Fairdale for matters connected with Rose Graham's marriage settlements. On his arrival he was at once ushered into the study, where Mr. Graham was waiting for him with the family solicitor.

This gentleman, a Mr. Sowberley, of Lincoln's Inn, was accustomed to prepare the legal instruments which cement aristocratical weddings, but it had not often been his fate to draw up settlements so favourable to the bridegroom of an heiress as those which he had brought down in his mottled tin box. He was a learned, lackadaisical gentleman in a swallow-tail, who liked to offer objections, and was never so pleased as when he could tie up money so tight that the nominal owners of the same wasted their strength in trying to get at it. The wills which he dictated led to interminable suits in the Probate Court, the legatees screaming for relief as if Mr. Sowberley were bodily sitting down on them. No bequest was rational in his opinion unless saddled with restrictive conditions. He made the lives of wards burdensome to them with Chancery guardians and educational clauses; he brought husbands into violent collision with their wives' trustees, and widows with their husbands' executors. Out of his intricate knowledge of property acts he wove snares where even cautious Scotch lords—the most prudent of persons—caught their legs. He was a terror to landowners who wished to fell timber on entailed estates, to widows who wanted to wear family diamonds, and to all people whatsoever who tried to renew leases on favourable terms, to raise money on mortgage, or to take short cuts across other people's fields. If his advice had been listened to, he would have engrossed a marriage contract which would have relegated every sixpence of Miss Graham's money to a custody so secure that anybody perusing the contract would have imbibed the impression that Colonel Forester was a person of the lowest standard of integrity, who required as much watching as a cat in a larder. This Mr. Sowberley called "taking the precautions necessary to secure the happiness of both parties," but Mr. Graham had shaken his head and told him to engross otherwise.

Deeds had been drawn up which gave over to the young couple property equivalent to 30,000*l.* a year. Of this income, one-third only was settled on Rose Graham as a jointure for her own separate use, the rest was handed over without any restrictions whatever to her husband, to hold during her lifetime and inherit after her death.

Mr. Graham took this opportunity of avowing that he was much richer than was generally reported. His income was not far short of 70,000*l.*, and he promised that if children were born of the marriage he would make special acts of donation for them out of the property he still retained. He next caused his will to be read, and called Philip's attention to a clause in it by which, in the event of his dying before his daughter's marriage, he bequeathed to his intended son-in-law 100,000*l.* free of legacy duty. "So that if sudden death were to take me between this and your wedding day," said he, patting Philip on the shoulder, "you would be provided for, and have no trouble with Rose's trustees." Mr. Graham wound up these legal proceedings by giving Philip a sealed envelope, which contained a cheque for 20,000*l.*, enough to cancel all the bridegroom's debts, leaving him a good balance of pocket-money. "Rose needn't know anything about this," said her father, with a smile, when Philip thanked him feelingly. "As for me, you know, I never thought a guardsman could live on his pay, so it doesn't surprise me you should have duns."

Rose had naturally wished to know nothing about the money transactions. She was waiting impatiently that the business in the study might be finished, so as to see her lover in her boudoir, and ask him all about his doings in London. He had executed her commissions. He came back to her full of affection and assumed cheerfulness, saying he had thought of her every minute during his absence, and blessed the flying hours that carried him nearer to his wedding day. She listened with rapture, glad to have him back by her side, clasping her hands within his, glad to hear him describe his adventures in town with playful graphic touches, which lent to the most trivial of them an interest.

"Tell me about your visit to the blind children," she said. "Did they seem very wretched?"

"No; one of them asked me for a box of sweets of *ever so many different tastes*. Another adored perfumery, and said that some scents made her cry with pleasure. All delighted in music, so I promised them a supply of musical-boxes and a grand piano organ."

"Poor little creatures! I hope all the money will really be spent on them, and not invested or locked up, for they would get no benefit from it."

"So I told the matron, dear, and we arranged that half the money was to be distributed in giving each what he or she fancied, and the other half was to buy bigger things that would gratify them all."

"And how did the poor little things who were born blind bear their lot?"

"Better than the others, it seemed to me. There was a little girl who had not lost her sight till she was ten, and who tried to explain to another who was born blind what a red coat was like. The poor mite ended by understanding that a soldier was dressed *like a noise of trumpets*."

Philip interested and amused Rose by adding an account of the blind children's lessons. He was in good spirits, for nothing awkward had occurred at Fairdale during his absence, and he came back to find only renewed trust and love. In the matter of the marriage settlements he had been treated as if the commonest precautions which are usual in giving heiresses away would be an insult in his case. Rose shunned all allusion to Margaret Field, but in the evening, while the two men sat over their wine, Mr. Graham expressed his gladness at the prisoner's release, and hoped that nothing more would be heard of her.

"I would willingly pay her husband to take her out of the country," he remarked. "I don't want you and Rose to be disturbed in your honeymoon by the assizes."

On the morrow, Sunday, the sun was shining brightly, and Philip, instead of attending service in Fairdale Church, walked over to Tolminster to visit Frank. The 12th Dragoons had gone to service in the cathedral, but presently they returned with band playing, and Frank, marching with his troop, sighted Philip standing outside the mess-room. As soon as the parade was dismissed he accosted his friend with a beaming face.

"Well, it's all right?" he asked.

"It's all right," answered Philip.

"She has slipped her cable, and won't trouble us any more!"

"No, she won't trouble us any more."

"Thank God," exclaimed the dragoon. "I was awfully fidgety, Phil. I had a kind of presentiment that we were coming to grief, and I was even afraid to ask Nelly to fix our wedding day."

"Well, you can ask her now," said Philip, rather dryly.

"Yes; and I must tranquillise Mrs. Baillie. She acted like a brick by us; but the worry has almost made her ill." And once again Frank Christy ejaculated, "Thank God it's all over!"

He was so glad that he patted Philip on the shoulder with something of his old friendly warmth, and drew him into the mess-room to have some lunch with Dicky Bool and other good fellows of the 12th.

CHAPTER XLI.

FRANK SHRIVES HIMSELF.

NELLY CHRISTY was closeted with a young person who had come down from a fashionable milliner's in London, with half-a-dozen band-boxes full of bonnets; and Frank, who arrived to pay a morning call, was admitted to give his opinion as to which among the showy collection of head-gear suited her best.

Nelly attundized before a looking-glass, trying on bonnets of no particular shape or size, but curiously wrought into gay fabrics by means of flowers, ribbons, and little stuffed birds. The young person from the milliner's said they all suited her divinely, and appealed for corroboration to the dragoon, who assented with puzzled nods. Nelly ended by choosing three bonnets, besides her brides-maid's bonnet of white and pink which she was to wear at Miss Graham's marriage, and blamed herself for extravagance, though she could not see how it would be possible to get through the winter with less.

"It's Monday to-day, and Colonel Forester's wedding is only a fortnight off," she said, when the young person had withdrawn. "I suppose you know, Frank, we are going on our visit to Fairdale to-morrow—papa and I—and shall stay there till after the wedding?"

"I should think you would be glad to leave this gloomy place, Nell?"

"No; I have grown used to the prison; it isn't such a bad place. The prisoners are to have singing-classes, and I should have helped the matron at the harmonium if I had stayed longer."

"I take it you'll come back again when you leave Fairdale?"

"Oh no; we shall go back to Lincolnshire then for Christmas, at least I suppose so. We have no other fixtures, as you gentlemen put it."

This led Frank to make his declaration, which he did by hinting that he should like to know the day when he himself was to be made happy. To punish him for not having put this question before, Nelly pretended not to hear. She would not come and sit down beside him either, but kept tripping about, trying on her bonnets again, untying parcels, and laughing off everything sentimental. When he poked a point-blank inquiry at her she said she supposed they would be married in two years or so. She couldn't think of marrying before two years—marriage was such a solemn

business, you see, and she must examine herself as to her fitness for it. Girls who aimed at becoming exemplary wives must read a number of improving books, contrive to do with fewer bonnets, and learn to make a pudding—at least that was the common talk. There were people who married in haste and repented at leisure, but that would never do. Fancy repenting at leisure!

At first Frank was amused, but by and by got nettled, and feigning to take her at her word, caught up his hat, and vowed he would go and negotiate and exchange into the marines, so as to spend his probationary term in the yellow fever countries. She let him get as far as the door, then ran and dragged him back by the cuff, seating him in an arm-chair, and hiding his hat in the side-board.

She told him not to stir till he was ordered. If he moved she would put a lump of sugar on his nose, as they did to Newfoundland dogs. Didn't he mean to be as obedient as a Newfoundland dog? If he was not prepared to fetch and carry at her bidding, what would be her inducement to marry him, when now that she was a girl everybody did exactly as she told them? Was he sure that he had a good temper too? If he could not stand being told to do thirteen things at a time he would never make a model husband. He must resign himself to have no will of his own, and always to look pleased—especially when the dinner was ill cooked. A great deal more to the same effect did Miss Nell say, till, having enough of her own nonsense, she dropped into a chair distant from Frank's, and laughed that she was tired.

He went and installed himself beside her and essayed to take her hand, but she pulled it away, and was amused by his jumbling up a compliment on her complexion with one on her dress. She was attired in brown velvet, prettily frogged in military fashion. Soon she complained that in frisking her hand back she had knocked it against the chair, which, maybe, was only a device to make him draw it from her lips to his own, kissing the place to make it well. This restored peace between them, and Frank remarked that January was a nice season for marrying.

"Oh, a wedding in winter!" demurred Nelly, "with a snow-storm and all the bridesmaids' teeth chattering. What notions of niceness men have!"

"But it never snows now-a-days," observed Frank.

"What should you say to a wedding on horseback?" she asked. "We both like horses, and it is time one introduced some novelty into wedding processions. Supposing I rode to church wearing a habit of white satin with a bouquet of orange-flower blossoms in front, a white silk hat—man's hat, of course—with a wreath and

veil round it, and had a milk-white horse, with snowy bridle, and a satin saddle-cloth worked with silver?"

"By Jove, a glorious idea!" ejaculated Frank.

"Well, but hear me out," continued Nell. "The bridesmaids ought to be mounted on white horses too. There should be twelve of them, riding four abreast, in habits like mine, but with bunches of forget-me-nots instead of orange-blossoms, and with light blue bows; and you, Frank, ought to be in hunting dress, with a white waistcoat and a bouquet; and if a hundred gentlemen of the hunt would attend in their red coats, and with wedding favours, what a pretty sight it would be!"

"Egad, where did you pick up that idea, Nell? it would work splendidly," said Frank.

"Wouldn't the newspapers talk about it!"

"There would be fellows from the *Illustrated* taking sketches of you, and saying you were the most stunning little bride who ever set foot in a stirrup."

"A bride on horseback—what a notion! All the old ladies of the county would call me horribly pert and fast!"

"All the old men would strangle them if they did."

But Nelly laughed, and said it was easier to talk of such things than to do them. If a duke's daughter would set the example she would follow it, for after all it was no more wrong to go to church on horseback than in carriages, was it? But only mighty people could afford to brave prejudice.

"Besides, if I got married in pink people might think I meant to go on living fast," remarked Frank, reflectively, "and I don't want them to think that. A fellow should reform—h'm—and that sort of thing."

"Oh, oh!" said Nelly, mockingly. "All men are alike; when they have had their 'fling,' as they call it, they love to play at saintship, and preach to their wives on the vanity of amusements."

"No, Nell, you misunderstand me. As to amusements, really——"

"Tut, tut, sir. You mean to tyrannise over me all day. If I want to go out to a party you will talk about worldliness, and moan quite grumpily near the coal-scuttle."

"I sha'n't be such a muff; you don't know me. What I mean is, that I won't go about enjoying myself unless you're with me. In fact it wouldn't be—h'm—enjoyment if you were not there."

"That's it: you'll tie me up to your sword-sling and make me go round barracks with you when you inspect kits."

"The men wouldn't complain if I did."

"Nor would Mr. Bool, I think. Are you still jealous of Mr.

Bool? If you had been Frenchmen you would have fought a duel about me."

"As we are Englishmen we made it up, and he is to be my best man. But I should be jealous of him if I thought you cared about him, of course."

Nelly saw that he was a little pained by her levity, and she felt sorry.

"Of course I was only joking, you dear old goose," she exclaimed, moving her chair close to his, and putting her hands on his shoulders. "Mr. Bool means to get up a garrison ball, and he has wished me to go, but I won't if you don't like it. What should I care if I never went to another party again. You shall be happy in your own way, and do what you like, and let me tease you at times, and I'll be as good a little wife as possible."

"By Jove, Nelly, you don't know how I pine to be home with you," said Frank, soothed, and with a real gush of tenderness. "I want our marriage to be soon because it will make a better man of me. If you can imagine a fellow tumbling down a pit, and a little woman like yourself putting out her hands to help him to climb up again, why that is what you have done for me."

He was serious enough now. Not for the world would she have interrupted him.

"And I don't mean to tell any more lies when I'm married," he added, moodily.

"Lies! oh, Frank, what are you saying?"

"I've told uncle a parcel of lies, Nell, for I swore I was out of debt, and I owe more than ten thousand pounds. Bets and cards, that's how the money went. I never spent a shilling of it in a manner I can look back upon with pleasure. I am bound to tell you this, dear, because if I took your money to pay my debts without having let you know the truth before we married, it would be a dishonourable thing."

"Oh, Frank, what does it matter whose money pays your debts?" she exclaimed. "It is most generous of you to confess all this."

"It wasn't generous of me to deceive your father, who has always treated me as his own son; but I do believe that if everybody was shying stones at me you'd stand up for me and make out that I wasn't to blame."

"Of course I should stand up for you if they shied stones, but why should they shy stones?" said she, with tears in her eyes.

"Ought I to tell uncle about these debts, Nell?" he asked, with an arm round her waist; "I will if you like."

"No, don't do that, dear," she answered, hastily. "There's no reason for it, and it might pain him. Have you told Michael?"

"No, but he has suspected it long ago."

"I suppose it is that which makes him often look so sad," said Nelly, innocently. "We will pay the debts when we are married, and nobody shall hear anything about it. But you have made me so, so happy by trusting me in this way, and I shall never forget it."

"It has been a relief to me to make a clean breast of it," was Frank's answer, and he meant what he said.

Sir Wemyss Christy had gone out to see an authentic centenarian who had been reported to him as living in a slum of Tolminster. By-and-by he returned, delighted with the old man, who was in possession of half his teeth and a third of his faculties. He had advised him to open his window and take seven full and deep breathings every hour, but finding that the window looked on to a drain-pipe, he had lectured the veteran's grand-children severely on the subject of miasms.

"If the old man had not lived all his life among miasms," said Sir Wemyss, "he would—would——"

"He would have been twice as old as he is now," took up Nelly, maliciously.

"My dear, your sex are not sanitarians," rejoined the Baronet. "Wait until you have babies to bring up. But what makes your eyes red? have you been crying?"

"Frank wants us to be married on New Year's Day, amid the sleet and snow," she answered, blushing.

"How do you know there'll be snow, my dear? The idea of crying about such a thing! The sooner you get married the better, and then we must find a wife for Michael. He'll be marrying that prison matron if we don't take care."

"Oh, papa! Michael marry Mrs. Baillie! Whatever can have put that into your mind?"

"H'm, a superior, sanguine woman, and he a nervous, phlegmatic man, such temperaments have affinities," said the old Baronet. "But I shouldn't like that match, for it would keep Mike all his life in this prison, and I don't believe the atmosphere of it is healthy for him. He grows graver every day, and it is good for men that they laugh at times, even in a prison."

"I think you'll make him laugh if you talk of his marrying Mrs. Baillie," said Nelly, sceptically, for she was unable to associate such a thing as love with a matron who carried a bunch of keys at her girdle, and whose habitual talk to her was of prisoners' rations and washing.

CHAPTER XLII.

DOINGS IN GAOL.

SHE had not many opportunities of seeing Michael and the matron together.

Since Margaret had left the prison a gloom seemed to have fallen on it, so far as the chaplain was concerned ; but to Mrs. Baillie it appeared as though the place had been cleared of a plague. Both now applied themselves to their duties with renewed ardour, trying, though in a very different spirit, to put away the remembrance of the prisoner who had given them such trouble.

Michael knew that Margaret was in Dr. Billing's asylum, and thinking that this was a place of comfort, he rejoiced that she was being well cared for. Mrs. Baillie had been assured by Frank that Margaret had privately started for America, where she was to reside on a pension, and this set her mind at rest. During a few days she lived under a sense of security, and sought to ingratiate herself with the chaplain by being useful.

Michael had a great deal to do. A prison is a large parish, and Mrs. Baillie was the only person who gave him any assistance.

He wished to found a singing-class, that the prisoners might sing in tune, for the howling in chapel was more than he could stand. Mrs. Baillie at once entered into his scheme and put it into practical shape. She overrode the objections of the visiting justices, who grudged every hour taken away from hard labour, and she silenced Mr. Barker the schoolmaster, who had grown up in lazy ways under Mr. Jabbot, and did not like the zeal of the new chaplain. Mr. Barker was clerk and librarian as well as schoolmaster, and from the first he had put spokes into Michael's wheels.

Mrs. Baillie had a more difficult struggle with the governor's daughter, who volunteered to play the harmonium. Mrs. Baillie could play better, and Michael thought it preferable to accept the matron's services. Hereupon the sentimental Miss Clarinda Keyser was offended, and prevailed upon her mother to urge upon her father that the singing-classes were not necessary, and would be a waste of time. Michael had to beg Nelly to persuade Miss Clarinda to hold her peace, but all this required diplomacy. So many are the petty miseries of those who want to innovate.

The first practice of the singing-class took place while Nelly and Sir Wemyss were still residing with Michael ; and it was an import-

ant event to the chaplain, who built up many hopes on it for the moral improvement of the prisoners. Forty men and four women had been selected, rather with reference to their intelligence and vocal dispositions than to their good conduct; and the time appointed was from half-past four to half-past five, which did not diminish the men's work on the treadmill (the wheel and cranks being stopped at four), and only relieved them from an hour's oakum-picking in their cells. The big, bare chapel was lighted with gas, and the men filed into the lowermost rows of boxes as for the ordinary services. They were on their best behaviour, but cast foxy glances of curiosity at Miss Clarinda, Nelly, and Sir Wemyss, who were in the chaplain's pew; at Mrs. Baillie, who sat at the harmonium under the clerk's desk, and at the leather-lunged Mr. Barker, who, disapproving of these new-fangled proceedings, rose between them, glowering like a statue of Protest.

Michael, who stood in his pulpit, without his surplice, commenced with a few prefatory words in explanation of his object in founding these classes; and whilst he spoke Mr. Barker kept his eye fixed on the ceiling, making up his face into a tongue-in-the-cheek expression, as one who would laugh if he were in better company. Besides objecting on general grounds of conservatism to many of the new chaplain's doings, Mr. Barker resented them as encroachments upon his own right of initiative, and his importance. He was a strapping fellow with a big black beard, a bulbous red nose, bushy eyebrows, and blood-shot complexion, with cheeks wrinkled into folds like those of a very ruddy pudding-apple, half roasted. He was slovenly and even unclean in his dress, and not odoriferous when approached. His week-day apparel was a flannel shirt with a soiled paper collar, a coat from whose greasy collar half a pint of oil could have been pressed, and black trousers smirched with pipe-ashes and blotches of gravy. Mr. Barker had been schoolmaster in several workhouses before coming to Tolminster, but inspectors found him unequal to the educational standards of these days, and the Eastshire justices, good-naturedly unwilling to make an example of him, put him away privily from his last union into the county gaol, where they thought his insufficiency would be less noticed. He was ill-tempered, unsocial, and did little of the work he was paid to do. He had allowed the prison library to go to ruin, and he shamefully neglected the boys under sentence of hard labour, whom he ought to have taught for at least an hour every day. When wanted to write letters for prisoners who were illiterate, he was reported to be out with the Tolminster Volunteers tooting on the opicleide; and when perchance he went his rounds of the gaol to collect or distribute books,

he was often so saucy to the prisoners that they would fling stools at his head, and be flogged for it. Michael had made up his mind from the first that Mr. Barker must be compelled to mend his ways or go; meanwhile, as a choir-leader was wanted, and the school-master declined to undertake this office, he had been obliged to cast about for some other man. He had luckily discovered that the prison baker had been a cathedral chorister in his youth, and possessed a clear barytone voice and musical knowledge which he was willing to utilize. Accordingly this floury placeman had been pressed into service, and there he stood, at Mrs. Baillie's right hand, diffusing little clouds of dust from his white garments every time he moved a limb, but obligingly serene, and keeping his eyes attentively riveted on a sheet of music.

Mrs. Baillie touched the harmonium and gave out a keynote; thereon Mr. Barker at once lifted up his voice. He had been informed that the baker would lead the singing, but he was one of those men who liked to be kicked in public places, so that they may have an excuse for roaring.

"It's an understood thing then, sir, that I am not wanted at these practices," he said, glancing up at the pulpit in an injured way. "If so, it is of no use for me to come."

"We shall always be glad of your assistance, Mr. Barker," replied Michael. "Every one of us ought to feel much obliged to Mr. Toaves for consenting to lead, for it was not fair to lay upon you the double duties of clerk and choir-leader."

"Mr. Jabbot always thought me equal to the duties, sir," growled Mr. Barker. Then addressing the baker in an audible stage-aside: "Well, Toaves, since you are doing my work I may as well go down to the bake-house and see that your bread doesn't burn."

"My bread can take care of itself," fired up Mr. Toaves, who was a puffy little man, very testy when pricked.

"I would rather you stayed, Mr. Barker," said Michael. "If you don't remain to please yourself, pray do so to please me."

There ran a titter among the prisoners, for the clerk had already descended two steps, and the baker and he were eyeing each other as if they meant to fight. Mr. Barker retraced his steps, but with a very ill grace, and yawned throughout the proceedings.

Again Mrs. Baillie touched the key-board, and the class commenced practising the *Gloria* and the *Kyrie* after the commandments to easy tunes, which most of them had heard in churches. After that the *Venite* was tried to an air more melodious than that in common use, the baker and his men acquitting themselves with creditable effect. Many of the prisoners had good voices, which

only required a little cultivation, and all, being stimulated by Mrs. Baillie's excellent playing, did their best. There was a sailor sentenced for street brawling whose rich bass must often have trolled "Tom Bowling" on the foc'sle out at sea, a few soldiers who with their songs must have enlivened the long evenings on board troop-ships outward bound, and costermongers who had been wont to catch up the chorusses in music-halls; then the women—one of them Barby Haggit, another a girl who had been teacher in a Sunday school before some man coaxed her from her village to cast her on the streets—both of these joined their fresh voices with tuneful sweetness to the singing of the men. Mrs. Baillie herself sang in a tone that was perhaps a little too metallic for *sol*i, but which did well in a choir with such a voice as the sailor's to blend with it and prevent it from sounding above the rest.

After the canticles had been disposed of there remained just time to practise one of the hymns that were to be sung on the following Sunday. It had been selected by the chaplain, and its touching appropriateness to his state of mind made him join in it with fervour.

"O Lord, how happy we should be
If we could cast our care on Thee,
If we from self could rest,
And feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best."

Miss Clarinda, Nelly, and Sir Wemyss all joined in the hymn too. On the whole this first practise was a success. As the prisoners were filing out, Nelly leaned forward to ask Michael who was the girl who had been singing so well, she who had Number 1 on her brass plate.

"That's Barbara Haggit, the matron's servant," said Michael.

"What is she here for?"

"Infanticide."

"Oh," said Nelly.

"She is a good girl though," added Michael. "She will be released this week, and I don't think she ought to have been here at all."

Barby Haggit's term was indeed drawing to an end. During the last few days of her confinement Michael talked to her several times about her future prospects, and was glad to see that she was quite competent to take care of herself. Of repentance for her fault she felt little, for she kept on repeating that her eighteen months ought to have been divided equally between her child's father and herself,

and that there was no justice on earth ; but she felt the degradation of having been in gaol more than she confessed. On the day before her release Michael slipped a couple of sovereigns into her hand, and this made her whimper. But she was a sharp girl, who understood that the gift was rather an acknowledgment of her services towards the late "Fifteen" than a token of personal regard for herself, so wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, she said, "Oh, sir, I hope the poor lady's well. It went to my heart, it did, to see her fret so, and I told her afore she went how good you had been to her a-paying for those vittles and things."

"You ought not to have told her," said Michael, colouring. Then he imprudently continued the conversation instead of going away.

"I couldn't abear to hear her talk ill of yer, sir, as if you wished her ill," Barby went on. "That day when she wanted to post the letter to her friends I'd have brought it to you if she 'ad let me, but she wouldn't hear of it."

"What letter do you mean?"

"Hasn't the matron told yer then? I'd better not speak about it if she hasn't, leastways if you'll promise not to tell her I don't mind."

"You must not tell me anything which it would be wrong to disclose," answered Michael.

"Oh, I'll tell yer, sir ; as I'm off to-morrow she can't do much to me, though I'd rather you didn't mention it till I was gone," and Barby, who was not sorry to relate how she had been stripped and searched, gave a full account of Margaret's ineffectual attempt to send off a letter. "During two days the matron kept the governor from going near her, sir, saying she was like a wild thing—which she wasn't any more than you or me."

"Mrs. Baillie must have been the best judge of that," said Michael, coldly, not wishing to side against the matron, and he walked off. But he remembered how Mrs. Baillie had prevented him from visiting Margaret in the infirmary, and his confidence in her was shaken, for she had no business to prevent any prisoner from remitting a letter to the chaplain.

Barby was disappointed at not having produced a greater impression, but the two sovereigns remained to her, and that was consoling. One she kept to pay her journey to London, but the other she resolved to bestow as a parting gift on Tom Piper. That gentleman had had no more sherry since Margaret's departure, and as Barby had not had a chance of explaining to him the reason of this, he was, as she presumed, growing morose. Going down to the

oakum-room for the last time with the matron, the girl was so fortunate as to be left alone for five minutes, and Tom Piper, who had concealed himself on hearing her steps, emerged forthwith from behind the ropes. His countenance was reproachful, but before he could speak some bread and cheese and a sovereign had been thrust into his hand.

"There, that's all I can do for yer," said Barby, beneath her breath, "and I sha'n't see yer agin, for I'm a-going out."

"Where did yer prig the shiner?" asked Tom, pocketing the coin deftly, whilst his eyes glistened.

"I didn't prig it," replied Barby, indignantly, "it was given me. Good-bye now, and try to act square when yer get out."

"Same to you, my dear. But I say, just stop a bit and tell me where I can find yer in London."

"I dessay you want to come over me and get my wages, doan't yer? I've been served that trick afore."

"No, my dear, but a girl like you 'ud just suit me; I ain't such a bad sort."

"Of co-course not," said Barby, mocking his tone. "You're a good sort to make a girl slave for yer, whilst yer goes boozing, and when the babby came you'd step it, just like t'other. If you want to find me in London yer'll have to hunt for me."

"You're a rum 'un," said Tom Piper, as the girl slung the oakum-basket over her shoulder, with a wag of the head, and in this exclamation which closed his prison idyll there was, maybe, as much admiration as in the better-turned compliments of polite society.

Michael scarcely recognized Barby when she came next morning to his office to take leave of him. She was decently dressed in the clothes she had worn on entering the prison, and the flush which the excitement of being liberated put on her cheeks rather improved her. It is wonderful how a bonnet and shawl transform a woman whom one has always seen with a broom and a prison-cap. Michael shook hands with the girl, and bade her write to him if she should ever be in need of assistance; she thanked him and curtsied. This was all that passed between them, and Barby went out into the yard to leave the prison through a door in the porter's lodge, over which was painted this valediction to departing prisoners: "GO AND SIN NO MORE."

So long as Barby had been in the gaol Michael had said nothing to Mrs. Baillie about Margaret's letter, but once the girl was gone he betook himself to the matron's parlour to probe this mystery. Mrs. Baillie was making out a list of books which he had requested her to choose as suitable for female prisoners, the visiting justices

* having promised him a grant to re-stock the library. Laying down her pen, she saw that there was something strange on his face, and the smile with which she had greeted him died away.

"Barbara Haggit made me rather a painful communication, Mrs. Baillie," he began, gravely. "She told me you had prevented Mrs. Field from handing to the governor a letter which she desired to forward to her friends. Do you mind giving me an explanation of this matter?"

To his surprise Mrs. Baillie made no denial, but turned scarlet, and sank on her chair with her hands to her face.

"Oh, that girl! what have I done her that she should break faith with me in this way?" she faltered. "I acted for the best, Mr. Christy, I assure you."

"Who were the friends to whom Mrs. Field addressed her letter?" continued Michael.

"Her parents, I think, but I don't know; I can tell you no more. You need not to be anxious about Mrs. Field, she has left the country of her own free will, and will not return to take her trial. She is well provided for."

"How do you know she has left the country?" said Michael, astonished. "I was told she had been put into an asylum. Have you heard of her since her removal?"

"I cannot answer you. The worry I have had on account of that woman has made me almost ill," exclaimed Mrs. Baillie, pressing her hands to her brow. "If you would hear my confession as a priest, Mr. Christy, I would make it you on my knees, but you would have to promise that no word of it should ever escape your lips, and that you would act afterwards as if you had not heard me."

"I can make no promise that would seal my lips or fetter my action in such a case as this," replied Michael, almost roughly; for his suspicions were all aroused. "You forget what strong personal motives I have for desiring to get at the truth of Mrs. Field's story. Have you any objection to tell me whether you know the name of her parents?"

"I must repeat that I acted for the best," declared the matron. "It was chiefly owing to my assistance that Mrs. Field was enabled to leave the prison at all. I may perhaps tell you everything some day, Mr. Christy, but not now."

"You puzzle me more and more," exclaimed Michael. "How can you have assisted? If you were aware of any facts concerning the prisoner, why did you not put me in possession of them, and alleviate the anxiety under which I laboured in respect of my brother?"

Instead of replying, Mrs. Baillie heaved a deep sigh, and let herself glide on the floor, swooning or pretending to swoon. Michael ran forward to sustain her, but she seemed lifeless, and he had to carry her in his arms to the sofa. When he had done this he did not linger, but rang for Miss Mac Craik, and went away. On recovering consciousness Mrs. Baillie was displeased that he had not stayed till she opened her eyes. She retired to her room, complaining of a fever and headache, and for the next three days remained on the sick list without showing herself. During that time Michael pondered over her singular utterances without being able to make any sense of them. All he could understand was that Margaret was gone for ever, and he thought it would be well if he could dismiss her from his mind altogether, but he could not, and a presentiment kept warning him that he had not seen or heard the last of the prisoner.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN.

A WEEK had elapsed since Philip Forester's return to Fairdale, and Mr. Graham's house was filling with guests who were to stay until the wedding. Nelly came with her father; there were some of Mr. Graham's relations from Lancashire, rich cotton-spinners, who brought their wives; and there was Lord St. Hubert, the head of the Forester family, a very fat and good-natured peer, accompanied by Lady St. Hubert, who was very thin and not good-natured. Philip himself removed his quarters to the "Crown" at Tolminster for etiquette's sake. He lunched and dined every day at Fairdale, but returned at night to sleep at the hotel.

This left him freer to keep up his communications with Edward Jasper. Towards the end of the week the valet wrote enclosing a letter from Nat Riddel, who reported "Captain Field's" return from France. A lonely house had been hired at St. Valery, a town on the coast of Picardy, and the Captain had engaged two French attendants, who did not understand a word of English, to wait upon Margaret. He had left these women in France, and now purposed engaging two English women who would assist him in taking Margaret as far as Dieppe. Unless he received any counter-instructions

from the Colonel he would have the patient removed from Dr. Billing's asylum on the following Monday, and cross the Channel on the same day. Did Colonel Forester wish to have another interview with Mrs. Field before her removal?

Philip did not; he thought it would be useless. He wrote, telling Nat Riddel to make haste, and to be sure that during her journey to France Margaret was not allowed to approach anybody to whom she might give a letter. It would be better that she should travel at night in a reserved compartment, and he hinted at the desirability of administering a narcotic to her in the sentence—*"Perhaps you could manage so that she might sleep throughout the journey."* By a strange oversight Philip posted this letter directed to Nat Riddel, instead of sending it through Jasper, who had general orders not to let any of the letters sent through him pass out of his sight, but to return them as soon as they had been perused by Riddel. Philip only perceived his mistake when the letter was gone, and it rendered him very uneasy for a few hours, but he reflected that Nat Riddel had every inducement to serve him well and none to betray him.

He was right to reason thus, for both Riddel and his accomplice Harry Redwood, *alias* Field, had compromised themselves too far for his sake to retreat. Harry Redwood was a man of good education, who had been a bank-clerk. Sentenced to seven years' penal servitude for forgery, and discharged after five years on a ticket-of-leave, he had eked out his living as a copyist after his discharge, but had found it hard to make the two ends meet until Nat Riddel had tempted him with the offer of this lucrative job. Riddel knew of the man's antecedents from having seen him at Scotland Yard, where the ex-convict was obliged to report himself periodically. Harry Redwood having now sufficient capital in hand to start in business, had no other ambition than to leave England as quickly as possible and emigrate to America.

He had lost no time in prosecuting his mission on French soil, and immediately upon his return secured the services of two women, both dull and docile, to guard Margaret on her journey. One was a person who had advertised herself in the papers as capable of controlling dipsomaniacs or imbeciles, and the other a girl called Betsy Dormer, on whose fidelity he could rely.

She was a servant-girl who had fallen in love with him, and whom he treated as a slave. In the depth of his misery, whilst he rented a garret at five shillings a week, she, the maid-of-all-work in the sordid lodging-house, had taken compassion on him because he had not enough to eat, and was evidently of superior station to the other

lodgers. Then love came because he scowled at her pity. He borrowed her wages and forgot to repay her, but she would have sold her last gown to give him a meal. She squinted, and was a slatternly, cow-like creature, with a heart much bigger than her head, which was always ill-combed. Speaking little, and finding it difficult to piece together things that were said to her, she used to lean on her broom and listen with her mouth wide open, smileless. She was just the woman to obey blindly.

On the evening when Redwood had engaged her he had an appointment to meet Nat Riddel at the house in Soho to receive money for his journey. The evening came, but the detective did not appear. After waiting two hours Redwood took a cab to the detective's lodgings in Peterborough Street, St. Pancras, for the next day was Sunday, an inconvenient day for getting money. He found the detective moping over Colonel Forester's letter, and so unwell that he had not been able to stir out.

There was an uncorked bottle of brandy on the table, and a wine-glass half full of the fiery spirit, whose fumes pervaded the room. The detective sat on the ledge of a chair, with his legs stretched out compass-wise, his waistcoat open, and his hand pressed on to his chest, which gasped. Redwood shook his head, and touched the bottle with the point of his umbrella.

"That stuff will kill you," said he. "How can you be such a fool as to drink it?"

"It's not from choice, man, it's the only thing that keeps me up. I think I'm done for. I fell down stairs in trying to go out to meet you. The whole of my left side feels numb. I ought to have remained another month at that doctor's, as he advised me to do."

"You can't go out in this condition, that's very certain," said Redwood, fingering the sufferer's left hand, which fell helpless as the pendulum of a clock whose mainspring is broken. "Hadn't you better send for that doctor, if you have faith in him—Dr. Tabor, of Crossbridge, isn't it?"

"There are as good as he in London," answered the detective, evasively, for he had not informed his accomplice that Dr. Tabor was Margaret's brother-in-law, and did not care to be dragged into this explanation.

"Well, then, get to bed; I'll undress you," said Redwood.

"Let us talk about the letter first, then I shall be able to go to sleep," was the detective's groaning reply.

He bolted another dram of brandy, and after the hacking fit of cough which it occasioned had passed away a flush settled on his cheeks, and he was able to speak composedly.

He said that the first thing to be done was to write to Dr. Billing, so the ticket-of-leave man sat down and penned this letter :—

“ 45, B— Street, Soho.
“ Sunday.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ Some of my poor wife's relatives in the North desire to see her, and I am of opinion that perhaps a short journey and home associations may do her good. At all events I think the experiment should be tried, and I have made arrangements for the patient's safe custody during her stay amongst us. Will you kindly send Mrs. Field to-morrow, Monday, at eleven o'clock, to the above address? I shall be there to meet her with some servants, whom I have engaged to take charge of her till further notice. Should it unfortunately happen that my poor wife does not derive the benefits which I anticipate from her change of air and residence, I will beg you to allow me to place her again under your kind and able care.

“ Please send me to-morrow an account of any extra expenses your patient may have incurred, and believe me,

“ My dear sir,

“ Yours very faithfully,

“ HENRY FIELD.”

“ Do you think he'll let her out on receipt of this?” asked Redwood, when he had read the letter aloud. “ Supposing he says the woman is not fit to be moved?”

“ He can't. He has been paid his first month in advance, so he'll lose nothing by parting with her before the month is up. When the two asylum women come you'll dismiss 'em with a tip, and hand over the lunatic to her new keepers. That's plain enough;” and again Nat Riddel gasped.

“ All right. Well, I shall want some money, you know,” said the ticket-of-leave man.

“ I'll let you have a hundred pounds.”

“ No, I want five hundred, besides the money for my expenses.”

“ How precious perky you've become,” remonstrated the detective, with a dull look. “ Don't be afraid, you'll be treated all right, and the better if you don't haggle.”

“ I'm not haggling, but I've been promised another five hundred for this new job.”

“ To be paid when we've finished with you.”

“ Well, you'll have finished with me when once I've taken that

woman over to France and left her with Jasper and the attendants. I shall sail straight for America then."

"Sha'n't you come back to England first?" asked Riddel, evidently pleased to hear of the convict's intentions.

"Why should I? I shall have a thousand pounds, enough to make a fortune with out there where I am not known, and it's no good coming back to run risks. Scotland Yard would make very short work of me if they found me mixed up in this game."

"Well, I'll give you the money," said Nat Riddel, casting a look towards a bureau with a key in it, and attempting to rise. But the effort was too much for him, and he faltered an excuse. "I don't think I've enough by me. Come to-morrow morning, and the money shall be ready."

"As you choose," replied Redwood, who guessed that the detective was reluctant to open the bureau in his presence. "Before going, though, I'll put you to bed; you'll never undress by yourself."

"I feel weak as a baby," moaned Nat Riddel. "I couldn't go on talking, it would make me faint. I want rest."

"How does your left arm feel? Can you move it a bit?"

"Just a little;" and a spasmodic jerk which he made gave some semblance of life to the limb.

"Ah, it's not paralysis then. A night's rest will set you up. Just lean on my shoulder and raise yourself whilst I slip your clothes off."

The detective complied, and after this he ceased to speak. He looked little better than a corpse, but he had not lost consciousness, and his suspicious eye followed every movement of the convict's as the latter folded his clothes and laid them on a chair. When he had been put to bed he turned his face towards the room and watched that nothing was abstracted from the table. Redwood asked whether he should summon the landlady or a servant to sit up with him, but he shook his head, and the convict remembered Riddel's having told him that he never suffered any of the people of the house to enter his room, being accustomed to make his own bed and so forth, and to lock his door with a patent key every time he went out.

Redwood turned down the wick of the moderator lamp to soften the light, and inquired whether he could be of further use. Nat Riddel pointed to the key in the bureau, motioning to him to turn it in the lock and give it him. On receiving the key he thrust it under his bolster.

"He's too wide awake to be in danger," mused the convict, and upon this reflection left him.

It was eleven o'clock, and the stars were shining brightly. Redwood threw his letter to Dr. Billing into the first pillar-box and walked to B—— Street, where he slept. The house looked strangely desolate, but Redwood as he stole upstairs could hear the stertorous breathing of Edward Jasper, who slept in a lower room. He did not like this man, who treated him somewhat distantly, and was evidently employed to spy upon him. But Redwood liked nobody, he suspected every one of spying upon him, and could not certainly feel comfortable in England, where every breath of wind seemed to him as the voice of a pursuer.

The next morning, Sunday, before the church bells had begun to ring, Redwood fetched Betsy Dormer from the lodging-house where he had formerly lived, which was in Seven-Dials. His summons came rather sooner than she had expected, but she laid down her broom and duster, renounced the month's wages that were owing to her, and followed him, without caring a cobweb for her mistress's clamours. Seeing him so well dressed, her guileless heart thumped with admiration. She huddled on the best clothes she had—an alpaca gown cracked under the arms, a straw bonnet with brown ribbons, and a tartan shawl with a great deal of red and yellow about it, which made her conspicuous as an overgrown macaw at a mile off. Redwood told her not to mind her box, but to pack up her linen in a bundle. They walked out together and took some roundabout turns down side streets to elude the espionage of the irate landlady, who was raving imprecations at being left servantless on a Sunday, and followed them to the first corner, asking how they expected she was going to cook her dinner. On reaching the Soho house Redwood gave his instructions to the girl, who listened as usual, like a sheep who is going to bleat. She had once cherished hopes of marrying Redwood, which were now destroyed by the sight of his prosperity, but her heart thumped all the same; she was so very glad to enter the service of this man.

"Now you perfectly understand me. You are going to have charge of a lunatic," said Redwood. "What shall you do if she tries to escape from you?"

"Wull she be-ite me d'yer think?" asked Betsy.

"What if she does, you fool? Can't you defend yourself with those lolloping arms of yours?"

"Oi'll knock her down then—if she lets me."

"You'll catch her by the neck like a chicken, and shake her till she sits quiet—that's what you'll do," cried the convict. "If she screams you'll shove your handkerchief into her mouth."

"Ees, I wull."

"And say Yes, *sir*, to me in future," continued Redwood. "Remember, my name is Captain Field, and you have neither heard of me nor seen me till to-day. If you blab of having known me in a lodging-house you'll get me into trouble."

"I doan't want to get yer into trouble," snuffled Betsy, sincerely.

"You had better not," answered he. "Here are five sovereigns, and you'll have ten more for going over to France with me. Now I'm going out, and you'll stay where you are. When you feel hungry you can go out and get some dinner at the nearest coffee-house, but don't be away more than an hour; and when you return, let yourself in with this latch-key. If you want something to amuse you, dust the furniture, make my bed, and light a fire in here and in the drawing-room."

Redwood then went down to the kitchen, where Edward Jasper was breakfasting off a steak which he had cooked for himself. The well-trained servant stood up, for his master had enjoined him to treat Captain Field with all outward respect, and Redwood highly appreciated this arrangement.

"One of Mrs. Field's attendants has arrived," he said, "and the other will come to-morrow. You will hold yourself in readiness to start for the Continent to-morrow night."

"Very well, *sir*."

"You have received no recent instructions for me from Colonel Forester?"

"None, *sir*. I expected a letter yesterday, but it didn't come."

"Colonel Forester wrote to Mr. Riddel, and it is arranged that Mrs. Field will be brought here from the asylum to-morrow, and she will be in your chief custody from that moment."

"That is understood, *sir*. But do you say the Colonel wrote direct to Mr. Riddel?"

Redwood nodded. He saw that Jasper looked doubtful and uneasy.

"I will borrow the letter and show it you if you like," he said.

"I should be glad if you would, *sir*," answered the valet. "I have to take all my orders from the Colonel; I shouldn't like to start without."

Redwood promised he should be satisfied, and left the house to go and see Riddel. The distance to St. Pancras was pretty far, but the weather was fine, and he set out for the detective's lodgings on foot. It was an hour when the churches are full and when only a few persons can be met, hurrying over the pavements with prayer-books in their hands. The ticket-of-leave man liked Sunday mornings, because he was less exposed to disagreeable rencontres in

the nearly-deserted streets. This morning, too, he was in good spirits at seeing all his prospects in such hopeful case. He built American counting-houses in the air as he walked.

At 15, Peterborough Street, he rang and was answered by the same housemaid who had admitted him the day before. Redwood was not known in the house. The girl had scarcely seen his features on his first visit, and she obtained no better view of them now, for, muttering Mr. Riddel's name, he brushed by her with his handkerchief to his lips and ran upstairs. The house was perfectly quiet. The landlady was a particular widow, who disliked noises, and took in none but respectable lodgers; at that moment she was away worshipping in a dissenting chapel. Nat Riddel's room was situated on the third floor, at the back, and before Redwood attained the landing he heard the housemaid's shoes click-clacking down the kitchen staircase, after which not a sound was echoed. He knocked at the door: there was no answer.

He turned the handle, and something hindered the door from opening more than half-way. It was a chair which had been overturned. Pushing the obstacle aside, Redwood stepped into the room, and saw that the table also had been overthrown. All the articles that had stood on it were strewn about the floor. The spirit-bottle was smashed, so were the globe and funnel of the moderator lamp; the contents of a sugar-basin were scattered into a pool of mingled brandy and lamp-oil. Between the table and the bureau, which was open, lay the detective in his night-dress, bedaggl'd with blood. His bare legs were poked out, livid and stark. He had fallen on his side with one arm doubled underneath him, and he was staring at the ceiling with his eyes glazed and his lower jaw gaping.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SELF-CONSTITUTED HEIR.

NAT RIDDEL was dead.

Almost as soon as Redwood had realised the fact, he closed the door and stood over the corpse, breathless with emotion. The shock had blanched him, and his knees shook. How had the detective met his end?

He must have crawled out of bed to open the bureau, and in so doing have stumbled, oversetting the table and chair in his efforts to regain his balance. Perhaps he had had a paralytic seizure, and had been killed by the concussion of his fall. As the bureau was open, it was evident that his strength had not failed him immediately on getting out of bed. Stooping to examine the body, Redwood saw a bank-note clutched tightly in the right hand; the body was quite cold, though cadaveric rigidity had not yet set in. He lifted the head, and perceived above the left temple a large ecchymosis, while the left ear and the part of the neck behind it were gashed and had bled profusely. This last wound had been caused by glass splinters, some of which adhered to the skin; but the large bruise must have come from the violent contact of the head with some hard substance—probably the brass-bound foot of the bureau. It was enough by itself to account for death.

In overhauling the corpse Redwood had stained his hands with half-coagulated blood. The carpet was in a horrible mess, and the place had the look and smell of butchery. Wishing to pursue his investigations, the ticket-of-leave man dragged the body by the shoulders away from the table; but it obstructed his movements in the small room so long as it remained on the floor, accordingly he made an effort and lifted it on to the bed. It was a heavy body, and the limbs being partially stiffened, it assumed a writhing posture on the counterpane. There it lay, yawning, and with its eyes wide open, in the affrighted expression of sudden death. Suddenly there was an inside gurgling, which Redwood took for a sign of life, and it made him start; but the noise only came from the shifting of the corpse. Redwood felt the heart and pulse, and there was not a flutter. For a minute he stood irresolute, watching; but he did not call for help.

It flashed upon him with a shock that there would be a coroner's inquest, and as he was in all probability the last person who had seen Nat Riddel alive, he should be called upon to give evidence. His identity would then be exposed. At an inquest on a former detective there would certainly be other detectives in attendance, who might recognise him as Redwood, the ticket-of-leave man. He would be cross-questioned as to the business which took him to Nat Riddel's lodgings, and seeing that he could give no account of his time of late, unless he confessed that he had been acting as Captain Field, he would be liable to all the suspicions that may assail a prevaricating convict who is found with a dead body bearing marks of violence. He might be accused of murder.

As this reflection made the roots of his hair chill and his brow

grow clammy, Redwood glanced towards the bureau. The leaf was down, and one of the inside drawers was open. He approached and saw a parcel of bank-notes lying at the bottom of the receptacle. There were twenty-three 100*l.* notes, six of 10*l.*, and seven of 5*l.*—in all 2,395*l.*, the amount of Riddel's fee from Colonel Forester, with odd money given him for expenses. Redwood had scarcely counted this fortune before he transferred it to his pocket. Why should he give notice of Riddel's death? What was there to prevent him from walking out of the house with this windfall! He had never set foot in the dwelling before the previous day, and Nat Riddel had certainly kept his relations with him a profound secret. If he went away the servant might depose that Mr. Riddel had received a visit from a stranger, but there could be no evidence to connect this stranger with Captain Field. Colonel Forester, when he read the case in the papers, might have his suspicions, but *he* had reasons for holding his tongue.

The only point to be made sure of was that Riddel had left no paper with Captain Field's address on it, and with nervous haste Redwood proceeded to ransack all the drawers and cupboards. The bureau was so full of letters and bills that, in despair of being able to examine them all, he heaped them into the grate and set fire to them. There were countless photographs, in packs, with brown elastic bands round them, and these he let alone; but finding a cash-box in which money rattled, he fumbled in Riddel's waistcoat for his keys, unlocked the box, and drew out about a dozen sovereigns, some German ten-thaler notes, and two or three letters, which, concluding to be extra important, he thrust into his breast-pocket. He was in such a hurry to get his search over and to be gone that he did not pause to re-lock the cash-box, but flung it into a corner; then he turned out all the long drawers, which were full of clothes. No wonder that the detective had objected to his landlady or her servants entering his room, for if they had rummaged his wardrobe they must have marvelled what manner of man he was—a thief or an old-clothes man? In one drawer was the complete disguise of a navy, muddy hob-nail boots and all; in another the undress uniform of a naval officer; in a third the costume of a clergyman. The cupboards were full of old hats, false beards and wigs, pots of rouge and broken spectacles. All these articles Redwood littered upon the carpet after shaking them out: it would have taken too long to fold them up again. At the back of a top shelf, which he reached by climbing on a chair, he found a rusty pair of handcuffs and a revolver in a case. The weapon he purloined along with a tin-box of cartridges.

The room looked as if a gang of burglars had worked their will on it, and the burning papers filled the atmosphere with acrid smoke. Redwood poured some water into a basin to wash the blood and dust off his hands, and while doing this cast another look round. But he noticed nothing more worth taking.

He then turned up his cuffs and steeped his hands in the water. The house was still funereally silent. A few doleful London hens were clucking in a neighbouring back-yard, and these were the only audible sounds. Redwood could not guess how long he had been in the room, for he had no watch, and this gave him the idea of appropriating Riddel's, which was a silver hunter with a gold chain. He was in the act of removing the chain, which, being of a peculiar pattern, was dangerous to wear, and he was wondering whether there was any other precaution he had neglected, when a knock resounded at the house-door. Though not a loud one it made him quake from head to foot, and checked his breathing. At all hazards he loaded his revolver. If caught in this disordered death-room, laden with spoil, he would have so little chance of escaping, if not the gallows, at least penal servitude for life, that self-preservation became his prime concern. He was not of murderous disposition, but it would have gone hard with any one who had driven him to bay at that moment.

The knock was answered; then the door was shut, and the housemaid's feet came pit-a-pattering up the stairs. She passed the first flight and ran up the second. "She's coming up here," thought Redwood, and, giddy with alarm, he rushed out on to the landing and met the girl as she set foot on the last step.

"It's a letter for Mr. Riddel, sir," said the servant, "and if you please the gentleman who brought it hopes Mr. Riddel's better."

"He is better, thank you, but he's asleep now," answered Redwood, huskily. "I'll give him the letter when he awakes. He hopes he shall be able to go out this evening. Is anybody waiting for an answer?"

"No, sir, the gentleman didn't want an answer, only Mr. Riddel was to be sure to go to him to-morrow if he could."

"Very well, I'll tell him," said Redwood, and he nodded to the maid, who tripped downstairs unsuspectingly.

It took the criminal several minutes to recover from this scare. The letter was from Nat Riddel's employers of the Inquiry Office, and expressed the hope that he would be able to resume his duties within the forthcoming week, as they were labouring under a pressure of business. As he read this missive it struck Redwood that there was no reason why the public should be allowed to jump at the

conclusion that Nat Riddel had met with foul play. The detective had been notoriously in bad health, and Dr. Tabor of Crossbridge would be in a position to certify to the fatal shaking he had received in the railway collision. Unaware that Riddel had lived in the doctor's house under the name of Johnson, Redwood tore off the blank page of the letter just delivered, and wrote on it: "*Send for Dr. Joseph Tabor of Crossbridge, who will prove that this death is the result of an accident.*" This paper he laid on the deceased's chest. He was on the point of forgetting to remove the hundred-pound note, which was still clasped in the detective's hand, but he repaired this omission, though he had to use so much force in loosing the fingers that the joints cracked.

Now Redwood had nothing to do but to decamp. He would have liked to restore something like tidiness to the room, but he had not nerve enough to remain in it a moment longer than was necessary. Seeing there was nothing more to rob or to destroy, he put on his hat without giving another look at the body, and crept out, descending the stairs with stealthy steps. Nobody saw him. An odour of Sunday dinner ascended from the kitchen and pervaded the front hall. Redwood's boots creaked over the oil-cloth, but the clatter of crockery below prevented him from being heard, and he drew back the lock of the door, went out, and softly closed the door behind him, like an adroit malefactor as he was. Once in the street he took the first turning, and then walked fast away, feeling at his breast-pocket to see that his notes were safe. In a couple of minutes he was secure from capture as a fish in mid-ocean; but abruptly he halted with the vexation of having forgotten something after all. Why had he not locked Nat Riddel's door?

If he had done that the detective's death might not have been discovered for a fortnight or more. Passing for a commercial traveller, Nat Riddel was so much accustomed to come and go without announcing his departures or returns, that if his room had been found locked it would have been concluded that he had gone out on one of his frequent expeditions, and no one would have thought of breaking open the door till the stench of putrefaction spread itself through the keyhole. However, it was too late to return now. Not for all the money he had stolen would Redwood have ventured back to the house, so he proceeded on his way, speculating as to whether the body would be discovered that day or the next.

But where was he going now that robbery had made him rich? Should he slip his cable and run to America, leaving Colonel Forester's concerns to take care of themselves, or should he continue serving the Colonel as if Riddel were still alive? He took several

contrary determinations upon impulse before his mind became calm enough to reason. Finding that he had rambled to the neighbourhood of Euston Square, he entered the hotel opposite the station, asked for a private room, and ordered himself some luncheon. While they were broiling him a chop he sat by the fire and counted his notes with trembling fingers.

They were all good ones (he had had a momentary misgiving lest some of them should be flash), and if the detective had kept any record of their numbers that record was now burnt: so they were verily his, Redwood's. And having now about 3000*l.* to begin life with, the ex-Manchester clerk could covet nothing more from Colonel Forester. Where then was the use of his remaining a day more in England to run fearful risks? For days past he had felt as if the pavement of London burned his feet, and now he ran a chance of being accused of murder if he stayed. Jasper might go to Riddel's lodgings to inquire about Colonel Forester's letter, and finding him dead would at once suspect Redwood. This last thought determined the ticket-of-leave man's resolution to abscond. There was a train starting for Liverpool at five. At that hour Harry Redwood stepped into a first-class carriage without any luggage, and was soon carried far away from London. "Every man for himself," he muttered; "Colonel Forester must manage without me as he can."

CHAPTER XLV.

AN EVENING AT DR. BILLING'S.

MARGARET had been transferred to the first division of Dr. Billing's asylum, which was that where the quieter patients were confined. It was a cleaner place than the third, where she had spent her first three days; its rooms were better furnished, and the garden was larger. But to live there was overpoweringly wretched. She felt that the society of the insane must end by producing madness, even as melancholy breeds melancholy. She was seated alone meditating in her room late on Sunday afternoon, when *Jemima* came in and informed her that she was going away on the morrow.

"You're in luck to get out of this place so soon, I can tell yer, and if I was you I would try not to come back."

"Is it certain that I am going?" inquired Margaret, as the colour flew to her face. Dr. Sprottle had declared to her the day before that she still required several weeks of cold-water treatment.

"We're going to take you back to your husband's house, and I hope you won't make such a bother as you did the other day," said *Jemima*. "I oughtn't to tell yer this, for it's against rules, but I do because you're quiet. Your husband has written to the doctor that he's going to take you to your friends in the country."

Margaret thought that Philip meant to try another interview with her. "I shall give you no trouble," she answered.

"Old Sprottle found yer 'ead was 'ot yesterday, and he scored yer down for another shower to-morrow, but yer needn't have it unless yer like," laughed *Jemima*. "I say, it's near six. The tea-bell will be ringing in a minute."

Margaret descended to the ground-floor to wait for the tea-bell, but as it still wanted a few minutes to the hour she took a turn in the garden to compose her thoughts. Her resentment against Philip was intensely deep, but she had reflected much on her powerlessness, and thought that if a new offer of release was made her she must accept it on any terms to get out of his power, and obtain a chance of communicating with her parents. Her only fear was that she might not be able to dissemble in his presence, for she loathed deceit, and felt that she would prefer death to the abasement of foregoing her just rights under any coercion. If Dr. Sprottle had seen her wring her hands in the garden he would certainly have pronounced her in need of another long bath, but under cover of the dusk she was secure from prying eyes. When the tea-bell rang she took a moment to collect herself, and walked indoors with a calm face.

The tea served to the inmates of Dr. Billing's first division was not a repast over which any one would have cared to dawdle. In a dingy parlour furnished with horse-hair chairs, and an old cottage piano, half-a-dozen sorrowful ladies sat round a table covered with thick yellow tea-cups and small plates of bread and butter. Each patient had her ration of so many slices, for it was imagined that a common plate might lead to wrangles for the possession of the slices which were most buttered. At the head of the table sat Mrs. Puckram, dispensing a weak, greyish beverage, ready milked, and sweetened with brown sugar, out of a battered urn, into which it was never thought necessary to put a hot iron, so that the mixture was tepid by the time it was poured into the cups. Mrs. Puckram also presided over a pot of marmalade, whose contents she administered in single spoonfuls to those who made application for it. She

would not for a great deal have trusted the pot into a patient's hands, although the ladies in this division were mostly reasonable enough to behave with propriety. Some of them were only troubled by harmless delusions, others were in the perfectly lucid condition which supervenes between epileptic crises; all were consequently in a position to feel acutely the misery of being treated like confirmed idiots by a vulgar and sour-tempered servant. As Dr. Billing, however, never troubled himself about his patients beyond paying them an occasional flying visit in the morning, they were perforce left altogether to the mercies of the attendants, whose system of management may be conceived by any lady who, having a boisterous housemaid, will ask herself how she would like to live under that person's despotic sway. Mrs. Puckram; or Bridget, as she was indifferently called, was the head attendant, and liked to impress her dignity by screaming and scolding. Less overtly brutal than Jemima Horris, she had none of the blunt good nature which the latter could put on in her easy moments, but was spiteful and slyly cruel. She insulted her patients with sarcasms which she knew were calculated to cause them exquisite pain, and when strait-waist-coating them she had a diabolical knack of pulling their hair in the tenderest parts of the head till they grew frantic. She was civil to patients whose friends "greased her hand" (to use her own choice phraseology), favouring them to the detriment of the others, and allowing them to tease and even assault the milder lunatics unchecked. If the latter complained, she answered yelling, "Your friends don't pay me to pet *you*. If they're so stingy as not to care a button whether you're well treated or not, that's their look out, not mine."

When Margaret took her seat at the table, Mrs. Puckram renewed a tart warning she had delivered to her at dinner-time that day, telling her not to spill anything, and to get her "eating" done quickly. Margaret accordingly ate her bread and butter in silence, but her next neighbour, an elderly lady of quiet manners, having made a remark about the weather, she civilly answered her. Mrs. Puckram instantly shouted to her to "shut up" that talking.

"You've time enough to jaw when you aint at your meals," barked she. "Other people want their teas as well as you. I aint going to be kept waiting here all the evening."

"Dr. Billing does not forbid us to talk at table," replied the old lady, who imagined herself to be a princess of the blood, and played a good deal at dignity, though she was otherwise inoffensive.

"I'll tell you what, Mrs. Alice, if you want to sleep in the

jacket to-night you're going the right way to work," said Mrs. Puckram. "Let me have none of *your* sauce, please."

At this moment there was a wail from the further end of the table.

"Bridget, tell Mrs. Lucy to leave off, will you, she keeps nudging me with her elbow," exclaimed an elderly lady, wiping some tea which had been upset over her by a crazy neighbour.

Mrs. Lucy, however, was a *protégée* of Bridget's, so the complainant got little by her remonstrance.

"It's you who are always aggravating others, Mrs. Jane; see, you dirty thing you, you can't even drink your tea without measing it all over your dress."

"But I tell you it's Mrs. Lucy's fault. She oughtn't to be in this division at all; and would not be if the doctor knew the truth about her."

"I suppose you mean that I tell lies then," cried Bridget, flaming up. "Let me hear you repeat that again, and off you go to the fourth this very night, and I'll book you for a shower to-morrow, so I tell yer."

"Mrs. Lucy did really nudge that lady, though," interfered Margaret, the more indignant at this miscarriage of justice, as Mrs. Lucy's victim was an invalid in delicate health.

"Who asked *you* to speak?" demanded Mrs. Puckram, turning upon her with a vicious glare. "A nice thing it is for the likes of you to give an opinion. When people have been inside gaols they behave themselves 'umbly in good company."

"Who has been inside a gaol?" inquired Mrs. Lucy, a madcap-looking woman, with wild black hair and a croaking voice like a man's.

"Why this here precious lady who wants to lecture *me*," exclaimed Mrs. Puckram, pointing at Margaret with her forefinger. "A murderous, vicious lunatic, who'd be hung to the gallers if you got your deserts; how dare you jaw at me."

Margaret turned almost sick from shame; but a young pale-faced lady, who was seated opposite her, made her a sympathizing sign not to answer, and she took the advice, though tears had started to her eyes. The other ladies, curious after the manner of their sex, had pricked up their ears and hoped they were going to hear more, but Bridget already repented, perhaps, having said too much. Her crooked temper was continually leading her into indiscreet remarks upon the private lives of the patients, which was a breach of rules, for all the inmates of the asylum were called by their Christian names, so that nothing about their families or antecedents might be

known beyond what they themselves chose to reveal. To repair her indiscretion, the uncouth termagant rose and carried the urn away, ordering Jemima and the other maids to clear the table. Some of the ladies had not finished their tea. They were told to look sharp and swallow it, and having done so retired into corners munching their remnants of bread and butter in cowed or sulky attitudes.

All the patients were garrulous, as captives usually are, and while the maids were at tea Margaret was freely catechized as to her name, fortune, and position in the world. The "princess of the blood" regaled her with an account of a long law-suit by which she had tried to establish her claims to the throne of England. The lady who had signed to her to remain quiet at table came and sat beside her, and explained quite reasonably that it was a waste of words to argue with the servants. She herself had been two years in the asylum, and had learned that the only policy was to bear everything with resignation. Dr. Billing never gave ear to a complaint. The servants did what they pleased, and it was her opinion (here her mind wandered somewhat) that they were paid on purpose to exasperate the patients, so that the relatives who came to see them might always find them excited. Upon Margaret's observing that she was going away on the morrow, all her fellow-sufferers surrounded her with exclamations of astonishment and envy. Mrs. Lucy alone, who owed her a grudge, asked her croakingly whether she were going back to prison.

When the servants returned, to the number of half-a-dozen, the patients lowered their voices, for they were accounted as nothing. The maids took the best chairs near the fire-place, ranged themselves in a semi-circle, and began to talk aloud, just as if they were in an apartment of their own. By-and-by more of them dropped in from other divisions, for the parlour of the First being more comfortable than any other in the house became a general *rendezvous* of a winter's evening. On week days any lady who could play the piano was requested to favour the company with some lively airs, and to the jangling strains of the untuned instrument the servant-girls romped like heifers, jumping, laughing, perspiring, and bringing down their shoes on the carpet with the vigour of farm-wenches crushing beetles; all this to the great tranquillizing, as it may be supposed, of nervous patients whose cure depended on quiet. On Sundays music was forbidden, and the patients who were in a humour for reading took refuge in books. The rest twiddled their thumbs, being afraid to converse above a whisper, lest the chorus of servants should bawl to them to hold their tongues.

Though pretty well conversant by this time with the customs of Dr. Billing's asylum, Margaret was surprised to hear Jemima and her fellows discuss their private affairs and the patients' with no more reticence than if they were in a deaf and dumb institute. They stretched themselves in slovenly postures, yawned, clasped their hands behind their heads, planted their feet on the fender, and tilted back their chairs. They related the antics of some of the lunatics in the house, and guffawed at them; they caballed against the cook and housekeeper, who stinted them of candles and watered their beer; they alluded to Dr. Billing as the "old 'un," and called his wife the nastiest, stingiest old cat it was possible to meet. All the paltry, greedy, carping tattle in which servant-girls abound gushed from the mouths of these over-fed, immodest sluts, who, for want of a controlling eye, had become insolent as magpies. By-and-by they quarrelled about half-a-crown which the husband of a patient had slipped into the hand of one of them, under the impression that he was rewarding his wife's servant, whereas it was another girl who held this situation, and claimed that the half-crown ought to be remitted to her. The pair were half-an-hour blackguarding each other over this matter, four siding with one disputant and three with the other, and all abusing one another as thieves, liars, and worse, till they were restored to unanimity and combined action by a sudden quarrel between the vixenish Mrs. Lucy and the meek Mrs. Jane, who were fighting like hyænas over a volume of the *Sunday at Home*.

These unfortunate patients were exchanging slaps on the face, kicks, and blows on the breasts; they had pulled each other's hair down and clawed each other's cheeks, and they were now rolling on the floor, Mrs. Lucy uppermost, and armed with a hair-pin, which she threatened to bury in the other's eyes. Mrs. Lucy, secure under Bridget's protection, was the bully of the division, and she was the aggressor in this case, as she had been at tea; but it was poor Mrs. Jane who was made to bear all the blame. As soon as she could be extricated, bleeding and sobbing, from the claws of her adversary, the servants shook her between them like an empty sack, telling her that she had been served well right for provoking Mrs. Lucy by not giving up the book which the latter wanted. As she continued to protest that Mrs. Lucy had snatched the book out of her hand without asking for it, she was bundled out of the room with thumps and the customary promises of a precious good dousing next day. Margaret heard the poor woman filling the passages with her cries, saying she would rather be killed outright than continue to live in this place of torment.

This scene made her so unwell that she asked Jemima if she might go to bed, and the latter consented. Margaret shook hands with her fellow-patients whom she was not to see again, and left the parlour followed by their wistful glances. It smote her heart to think that most of these poor creatures were going to spend the rest of their lives here, dying by inches in daily degradation and despair.

As she was undressing in her room, by the light of the wire lantern, Jemima, who had locked the door, put on a mysterious air, and going to a cupboard, poured out something into a glass, which she handed, smiling, to Margaret, telling her to drink. Margaret thought it was physic, and obedient to her new system of not resisting orders, raised the glass to her lips. But the contents proved to be a mixture of whisky, sugar, and peppermint.

"It's a treat for you," said the girl, answering Margaret's glance of inquiry. "As you are going to-morrow we may as well part friends. And, I say, remembering all the trouble I had with you the other night, I think you might ask your husband to give me a sovereign, eh? Those 'tips' are our perquisites, you know."

"I never touch spirits, thank you," said Margaret, laying down the glass; and seeing that Jemima was in a peaceable mood, she added calmly, "Why did you beat me so shamefully the other day?"

"I beat yer, mem? Why lor what are you thinking of?" echoed Jemima, with the coolness of innocence.

"Are you going to pretend that I dreamed all the unkind things you did?" asked Margaret.

"Why to be sure it's all dreams, mem! You were so out of your mind during twenty-four hours that you hadn't an idea of what was what. I beat you! why lor I wouldn't lift my hand to a lady like you if I were paid for it!"

"You are a strange girl," said Margaret, amazed by such falsehoods, but feeling it was useless to prolong argument in the face of them. "I am sorry to say I cannot promise you a sovereign, for I am unable to ask my husband for money."

"I'd take it kindly, mem, if you'd do something, for old Billing he's horrid mean in paying us. Haven't you some money of your own? At the prison they gave us a parcel of yours which they said contained valuables."

"They were some small trinkets, I suppose; but I had two rings on when I came here, and if Dr. Billing restores them to me you shall have one of them; it is worth more than a sovereign."

"Yes, do give it me, there's a good lady," said Jemima, eagerly; "and you'll slip it into my hands in the cab so that Bridget sha'n't see it, won't yer? else she'd want to go snags with me."

"Very well ; but mind, I shall not be rewarding you for your services to me, for I am very much dissatisfied with you," rejoined Margaret, coldly. "You must consider my present as an inducement to behave more mercifully to other poor creatures who may come here."

"You'll think more kindly of me when you're gone, mem, I hope," said Jemima, with a whine ; but as Margaret had turned her back, she put out her tongue at her, and in one gulp swallowed the untasted whisky, remarking that she took this sort of drink because it did her inn'ards good.

Next morning after breakfast, which Margaret took in her room, Dr. Billing came up to announce to her that she was going away, believing, as he did, that she was ignorant of the fact. He sported his clerical white tie, broad shirt-front, and glossy hat, and making her a low bow, he asked smoothingly whether she felt benefited by her short stay in his house. Anxious as she was about the events that were in store for her, Margaret could not help smiling at this query. With her slight figure, small white features, and large dark eyes, Margaret was one of those women whom heavy men of the Billing calibre most admire and love to bandy cheerful words with. Showing all his jagged teeth, he simpered that he was glad to see her in so fair a way towards recovery. He and his friend Sprottle had thought of her, and would always think of her, most respectfully and affectionately. He was still going on in this style when a servant announced that the fly had arrived, whereon Dr. Billing offered Margaret his arm and escorted her through the private part of his house, which, as we have once said, was a very different place to that reserved for the patients.

Before parting with the doctor Margaret got her rings back, and one of them was furtively passed to Jemima according to agreement. This put the girl in good humour, so that she talked all the way, and repeated that she was sure Mrs. Field would behave nicely to her husband so as not to get put back into an asylum again. Bridget, who had got nothing, talked less, but was decently polite because she expected a tip on reaching Soho. Margaret sat silent, but her heart beat fast when the cab arrived at the house whence she had been borne a fortnight before, shackled and struggling.

Betsy Dormer opened the door, and behind her appeared Edward Jasper, whom Margaret had never seen before. Margaret was at once shown to the room where she had seen Philip Forester. She was left alone there, and went to the window as she had done the last time. The panes which she had broken were still unattended, and the splinters of glass littered the carpet, which proved that the

room was not inhabited. After standing a quarter of an hour she saw the cab drive off with Bridget and Jemima. A few minutes elapsed and then Edward Jasper entered the room.

There was something so strange in the expression of this man's pock-marked face; he looked so frightened and yet so darkly resolute that Margaret recoiled.

"You have heard nothing of Captain Field, ma'am?" he asked, fixing his eyes on her.

"No," she said to this unexpected inquiry.

"Have you heard from Colonel Forester?"

"Did not those women tell you that I come from an asylum, and that I have seen no one?" answered Margaret.

"Yes, ma'am. Do you mind remaining here a little? I suppose Colonel Forester will be here presently," said Jasper, upon whose features anxiety was deepening to a livid tinge; and he walked out before she could put him any questions.

CHAPTER XLVI.

EDWARD JASPER'S EMOTIONS.

He was in a predicament which gave him ample cause for anxiety. He had not seen "Captain Field" for twenty-four hours; he did not know what had become of Nat Riddel; he had received no instructions from Colonel Forester. Alone in this house with Margaret and Betsy Dormer, unexpected responsibilities had been thrown on his hands.

After sitting up late on the previous night to await Captain Field's return, Edward Jasper had gone to bed, concluding that the man would turn up in the morning, bringing Margaret with him. When Margaret arrived with her two attendants only, Jasper saw that there was something wrong. He let the two women go because they had received orders to return alone; but it straightway flashed upon him that Colonel Forester must have been betrayed by his hirelings, and that the sham Captain Field had absconded.

To a servant so devoted as Edward Jasper, this conclusion once formed suggested immediate action. Whether Field had bolted alone, or whether he and Riddel had gone off together with money extorted from Colonel Forester, it was evident that the Colonel

must be warned at once, and for this purpose he, Jasper, must leave the house for at least an hour. By some mischance the second attendant whom Field had hired to assist Betsy Dormer had not yet arrived, so there was no one to guard Margaret besides Betsy. Jasper had serious thoughts of carrying his prisoner by force to the coal-cellar, and locking her up there till his return. Had she evinced the least sign of fractiousness he would have done this without compunction, for he was no trifier in the matter of duty; but her quietness induced him to hope that Betsy might be equal to controlling her during his short absence.

He went to give his instructions to this girl, who was waiting in the parlour. As no arrangements had been made for Betsy's sleeping accommodation on the previous night, she had curled herself up on a hearthrug, and her hair was all tangled in consequence. Then Jasper had harassed her with cross-questions as to what she knew of Captain Field, and whether she could conjecture where he had gone, all of which had alarmed her. But Betsy had been yet more troubled by Jasper's alluding to the "lunatic" as Captain Field's wife. In her humble love for the ticket-of-leave man, the squinting servant-girl turned moodily jealous at hearing he was married. Her cheeks were hot from this bad news, and she hated Margaret without knowing her.

"Listen to me, young woman," said Jasper, curtly. "There's that lady upstairs, she is quiet now. If she rings you'll go and ask her what she wants, and speak civil. If she walks about the house you won't mind, but if she tries to go out or to cry to any people in the street you'll make her stop; do you understand?"

"Ye-es," said Betsy, sulkily.

"I am going out for a moment, so that you will be left alone with that lady. If you allow her to escape your master will make it hot for you when he returns."

"'Ow long shall yer be gone?"

"Not ten minutes; I'm only just going round the corner to buy a newspaper."

"All right," muttered Betsy.

In another moment Jasper had left the house, hailed a passing hansom, and told the driver to take him to Peterborough Street, St. Pancras.

He had a hope, but it was a very faint one, that Nat Riddel might not have absconded with Field, that it was the former's weak state of health which had emboldened the latter to decamp. To Jasper it seemed natural that these two men should have played the Colonel false, for he loved his master so well as to be suspicious of

the loyalty of all other persons who served him. But, like most uneducated men, Jasper was a slow thinker, and did not take in at a glance all the dangers that might accrue from Field's disappearance. He could see but one thing at a time, and was concerned chiefly about the inconvenience to which the Colonel would be put by having to alter plans which he might have made. For the rest, Edward Jasper was quite ready to take Margaret to any place of concealment abroad or at home, and to keep her there as long as his master's safety might require. He did not need Field to help him.

The hansom slackened its pace at the corner of Peterborough Street, and the driver opened the trap to say that there was a crowd blocking up the way in front. Jasper stood up to look over the horse's head, and saw that the crowd was massed in front of Number 15. Seized with a presentiment, he jumped out, paid his fare, and inquired of a group of workmen who were standing on the pavement what was the matter.

"There's been a murder," replied one of the men.

"Who has been murdered?" asked Jasper.

"A man at Fifteen; they say he was a detective."

"When was it done—to-day?"

"No, yesterday. The coroner has been sent for, and they're going to remove the body to the union. You'll see all about it in the papers."

Jasper's blood had run cold. He had no need to ask whether the murdered man's name was Riddel, nor whether anybody was suspected of the crime. He guessed the whole thing, and understood why Captain Field was missing.

Turning away to conceal his emotion, he walked out of Peterborough Street with unsteady steps, uncertain what he should do. A news-boy was passing—he bought a penny paper of him, and stood with his back to the lamp-post to read a long paragraph, which was headed:—

SUSPECTED MURDER NEAR KING'S CROSS.

"INFORMATION was, yesterday evening, given to the police of a death under mysterious circumstances at 15, Peterborough Street, St. Pancras. It seems that a middle-aged man named Nathaniel Riddel had been lodging in the house for the last fifteen months, passing there for a commercial traveller. Detective Inspector Pryor has, however, identified him as a former member of the Detective Force of Scotland Yard, latterly employed at Messrs. Gehazi's Private Inquiry Agency. About three weeks ago Riddel returned

from a journey in bad health, and stated to his landlady that he had had an attack of ague. Till then he had always been of sober habits, but from his beginning to send out the maid-servant pretty frequently for bottles of spirits, a suspicion arose that he was giving way to intemperance. Riddel was last seen alive on Saturday evening at seven o'clock, when he gave the servant some money to purchase him a bottle of brandy; he mentioned at the time that, in trying to go out to keep an appointment, he had fallen on the staircase from giddiness. Towards nine o'clock a stranger called to see Riddel and remained with him nearly two hours. Yesterday morning, Sunday, this person called again soon after eleven o'clock. He is described as tall and swarthy, a man of soldierly appearance. The servant had the opportunity of seeing him closely, for at about noon a gentleman, since ascertained to be one of Riddel's employers, delivered a letter for the deceased, and upon the maid's carrying it up to the third floor she was stopped on the landing by the stranger, who said that Riddel was asleep and must not be disturbed. He took the letter, and promised Riddel should have it when he awoke. The hour at which this visitor left the house is not known, for he opened the street door himself, and made no noise in doing so. At three o'clock Mrs. Simpson, the landlady, thinking that her lodger, if still unable to go out, might like to have something cooked for him, sent up the housemaid to make inquiries. No answer being returned to the servant's knock, she became alarmed from noticing that her lodger's key was in the lock, a circumstance which proved him to be at home, for he was always particular in carrying away the key when he went out. The maid opened the door, and a horrible sight met her gaze. Riddel was lying dead upon his bed, his night-dress being saturated with blood, and his room in a state of the utmost disorder, showing that his drawers and cupboards had all been ransacked. On the deceased's breast lay a paper bearing a request (not written in the deceased's hand) that Dr. Tabor of Crossbridge might be summoned to prove that the death resulted from an accident. The police having been communicated with, Dr. Evans, the divisional surgeon, arrived to examine the corpse, and declared that life had been extinct for some hours. He gave it as his opinion that death had been caused by a blow from a contunding instrument, which had left a large ecchymosis above the left temple. Shortly after four Inspector Pryor came from Scotland Yard, and his first step was to despatch a constable in plain clothes for Dr. Tabor of Crossbridge. Dr. Tabor, on arriving from the country, recognized the deceased for a Mr. Johnson who had been injured in the recent railway accident at Crossbridge, and had resided for a week in his

house. He added that Mr. Johnson had been formerly valet to Colonel Philip St. Hubert Forester, late of the Guards, and said that Colonel Forester had called several times to see the deceased while the latter was lying ill at Crossbridge. Puzzled by these statements, which are at variance with Riddel's antecedents as known to Inspector Pryor, who was his comrade in the detective force, the police feel that the deceased's identity is enveloped in some mystery which the evidence of Colonel Forester will doubtless dispel. By the time this is in print the Colonel will have been communicated with; meanwhile the police think they hold a clue to the murderer."

Edward Jasper ground his teeth.

"The d——d hound has murdered the man and 'robbed him," muttered he, as he crushed the newspaper. "My God, what will come to the Colonel of all this?"

His first thought was for his master. Though unaware to what extent the Colonel had involved himself with Riddel, the servant felt that if his master were put into the witness-box at the inquest all the secrets of his past life would explode. Jasper was not one of those who believe much in the finger of Providence, but he believed in the omniscience of the police for worming out unpleasant facts and publishing them. The last sentence about the "clue" (which is always inserted in such reports) suggested that Field would be arrested forthwith, and there could be no doubt that such a man would at once disclose all the circumstances of his relations with Nat Riddel and the Colonel. Jasper fairly groaned at the black cloud of troubles which he saw about to burst on his master's head.

It was of no use now to telegraph to the Colonel as he had meant to. Probably Colonel Forester was in London by this time, summoned by the police. Jasper's post of duty was in B—— Street, where he must wait until he received fresh orders about Margaret. He took another cab and was quickly driven to Soho. It was about one o'clock, and he had been away rather less than an hour.

As he alighted from the cab a voice hailed him. "Hi, Jasper!" It was Colonel Forester, frightfully pale, but otherwise unruffled. His calm always seemed to be most complete in the hours of danger.

"I have been walking up and down the street this half-hour, wondering where you were," he said, quietly, as he advanced. "Is there no one in the house to answer the bell?"

"Mrs. Field is there, sir, with an attendant," said Jasper, with bated breath, as he touched his hat. "Oh, sir, what a business this has been. Have you seen the police?"

"Yes, I have been questioned. Never mind that. Pay your cabman, and let me into the house."

Jasper threw the driver a florin, and, accustomed to obey without questioning, he ascended the door-steps. With shaking fingers he opened the lock by means of his latch-key. The Colonel passed in, and he followed, but the instant he was in the hall Jasper perceived that something new had happened. The parlour door was open, but Betsy was not there. He called to her over the kitchen stairs, but there was no answer. He ran up to the drawing-room, but it was empty. Then he hurried to the upper storeys, but all in vain. There was no trace of Margaret anywhere in the house. She was gone, and Betsy Dormer too.

"My God, sir, here's some new trouble," faltered Jasper, tottering downstairs to the parlour where his master was waiting. "They've both escaped."

"Why did you leave Mrs. Field alone with but one woman?" asked Forester, with a deadly sort of composure, though his lips were ashy and trembled.

"What was I to do, sir?" asked Jasper, in an agonized voice, and he explained the predicament in which he had stood. His voice was frequently broken with gasps, and he concluded with an outburst of oaths against Betsy Dormer.

"Everything has run against us," said Forester, frowning dejectedly, and speaking as if he were soliloquizing. "There has been murder; there will be an inquest, a trial. I am pretty well done for."

"What are you going to do, sir? Hadn't you better leave the country for a while? It may all blow over," suggested Jasper.

"Leave the country! No," said Forester, waking up. "I am going to Fairdale. I may as well face the storm there as elsewhere. After all, a game is never lost till it is ended."

"Shall I go with you, sir? or shall I stay and try to find this woman?"

"No, let her go her own way. I don't care now. You had better go and hide somewhere, for the police have found a letter I wrote to Riddel, and they may come here, and, if discovered, you will be asked questions."

"Give me a chance of serving you again, sir, if you can," implored Jasper, so hoarsely that he seemed to be choking. What agonized him was to see Forester so hopeless.

"I'll write if I want you," answered Forester, absently, and he walked out with his head drooping; but in the hall, when he had put a hand on the door, he turned and said abruptly, "Good-bye,

Jasper. I ought not to have led you into this mess. Cross paths don't lead to much good, you see." And he walked out slowly.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PHILIP NERVES HIMSELF.

THIS blow had fallen upon him amid the full happiness of a new-found peace. He had been spending a quiet week with Rose, making plans for his honeymoon. On the previous day, Sunday, he had accompanied her to service in Fairdale Church, and had tarried to take the communion with her at her request. He had almost come to persuade himself that in putting Margaret out of Rose's path he was doing a justifiable thing, seeing how much Rose loved him. Mentally vowing that he would sin no more if he could but succeed in this last sin, he had tried to strike a bargain with Heaven, but his sin had found him out, and now it seemed as if no disgrace was to be withheld from him.

The misery of the thing was, that he could forge no excuses which would satisfy others as they had satisfied him. Looking back upon the past, he was amazed at his rapid descent into criminality.

And to think that thousands of men lapse into crime every day, and that one man's retribution never deters another. A first offence leads to a second, and a second to a third, till, dragged into destruction by the fatal consequences revolving like so many cog-wheels, the criminal's moral self is mangled out of all shape. It is a law of nature immutable as those of gravitation, and of such old experience that every father has taught it to his son, since first man was allured towards wrong-doing. If Philip could have foreseen, when he first denied all knowledge of Margaret, to what a series of reckless misdeeds this one lie would pledge him, he probably would not have told the lie, but this poor excuse only amounts to saying that if he had known before jumping out of a window that he would break his head on the pavement he would not have jumped. What right has a man to count that a friendly obstacle will break his fall?

"I must confess everything to Mr. Graham," murmured Philip, as he walked away from B—— Street, and this resolution, by making a new call on his courage, gave him some hope.

Perhaps Mr. Graham would absolve him in consideration of his

love, and assist him to hush up as much of the scandal as could be hushed up. He thought of Rose as a man sinking deeper into the dark looks up to the light. The kiss which she had given him that morning kindled back on his cheek in a flush. Poor blind child, whose hero and sweetheart he was, how would she bear it if his honour was sullied and he was banished from her? But why should he not marry her after all if he could prove to her father that he was not Margaret's lawful husband? The world was wide, and if he became an outcast from England, he and Rose might go abroad together.

Then a host of phantoms sprang up in the wretched man's sight: Michael Christy, Frank, the Hawthornes, Dr. Tabor, and principally Margaret—all so many enemies with whom he must reckon. He expected no quarter from Margaret now that she was free. Where would she go now, and how begin her revenge? It occurred to him that she might make her way to Fairdale, intrude into Rose's presence, and create a horrible scene by accusing him.

This thought spurred his steps. He had roamed far from Soho before he asked himself where he was going, but he found that he had instinctively been guided towards the railway station. The smoky building with its cabs and porters lay before him. Entering the station, he proceeded to the platform, and the first person he saw there was Dr. Tabor, who was waiting for a train. But the doctor was not alone. That old gentleman in the broad-brimmed hat beside him could only be Isaac Hawthorne.

The two had perceived the Colonel before he saw them, so that he could not retreat. They accosted him civilly, but their faces were grave, and there seemed to be some diffidence in their manner.

Dr. Tabor explained, as if in commiseration of the Colonel's evident trouble, that his father-in-law had been summoned to aid in the identification of Nathaniel Riddel's body, and they were both to attend at the inquest on the morrow. The coroner had also expressed a wish to hear Mrs. Tabor. As the Colonel had already seen the doctor at Peterborough Street that morning in the presence of the police, the subject of the murder was introduced without preface.

"I have been again to that poor man's lodgings to inquire whether any new facts had come to light," added the doctor. "The police appear to be convinced that there was a murder."

"And is that your opinion too?" asked Philip.

"The robbery would make one think so, although the wound on the temple might not be sufficient to account for death. What perplexes me is that the criminal should have left a request that I

might be sent for. How could he know that Johnson, or Riddel, had stayed under my roof?"

"I suppose he had heard the poor fellow allude to the care he had received at your hands."

"They must have been very intimate then, for Johnson concealed the fact from his own employers, the Gehazis. I have just seen those gentlemen, and they were not aware that Johnson had been hurt in the railway accident. He seems to have been very reticent with them, for he alleged that during the time when he was actually lying ill in my house he had been engaged in making some inquiries in the North for a gentleman at Tolminster."

"Do the police know the name of that gentleman?"

"Yes; it is Mr. Christy, the chaplain of the County Gaol. He has been communicated with and will be heard to-morrow."

Philip made no answer. The three had walked to the end of the platform, and as they retraced their steps they saw a news-boy posting up the contents' bill of an evening paper. It bore in large letters: "THE MURDER IN ST. PANCRAS—FURTHER PARTICULARS." Dr. Tabor went to the book-stall to buy a copy, and Philip was left for a moment with Mr. Hawthorne.

"Friend," said the Quaker, who had not spoken till then, "it must have grieved thee to hear that thy servant was dead?"

"I am in great sorrow about it," answered Philip.

"Hast thou any suspicions who it was that took his life?"

"No. I should be very sorry to harbour suspicions which might be unfounded."

"That is well spoken, friend," said the Quaker, and he paused a moment before adding, "Wilt thou allow me to put thee a question? How came that servant of thine to have two names?"

"Johnson was his real name, Riddel that under which he served the Inquiry Office," answered Philip, evasively. "There is a social prejudice against detectives, and I think he wished to hide from his friends how he earned his livelihood."

"Thou knewest then that he was a detective?"

"I did, but I concealed the fact from you at his request."

"His trade was none of our business, friend; but why spake he untruly to his employers, saying that he had been travelling in the North when he was lying sick in our house? It seemeth that he gave way to intemperance; perhaps the Lord had confused his mind. If so he wist not what he was saying or doing. Thinkest thou, now, that it was he who took the picture which we lost whilst he sojourned with us?"

"What makes you ask that?" stammered Forester.

He looked at the Quaker, but met only a pair of candid eyes beaming through spectacles. Isaac Hawthorne did not mean to accuse Riddel of robbery, but, allowing that the man's mind had wandered, as his strange falsehoods indicated, might he not have taken the picture under the influence of some delusion? Was it not within the bounds of probability that he had been a somnambulist? This would satisfactorily solve what was otherwise a disquieting mystery.

"They charged our servant Ruth Hay with the theft, but I never believed the damsel guilty," said the Quaker, shaking his head. "I would now fain think that the poor man whom the Lord hath called to Himself had an unconscious hand in the disappearance of our treasure. But I speak subject to thy correction, friend."

As the Quaker said this, Philip was strangely tempted to throw himself upon his mercy. He would never find a more indulgent hearer than this kind old man, who strove to find excuses even for a dead man's faults. His lips actually opened to exclaim, "Mr. Hawthorne, it was I who lured your child away. Hear me to the end and judge afterwards!" But Dr. Tabor, who had gone into the ticket-office, reappeared and said the train was about to start. The chance was lost then, for Mr. Hawthorne's son-in-law was a matter-of-fact man, whose cold blue eyes would have given no genial encouragement to such a confession as Philip had to make. In another moment they had all three seated themselves in a railway carriage, and Philip was glad to see two strangers enter, whose presence put a stop to confidential talk.

Till then he had never looked upon Frank Christy's complicity as destined to cover him in case of peril, but now he began to compute his allies, and he reasoned—that Michael Christy had an interest in preventing a scandal for Frank's sake; that Mr. Graham had the same interest for Rose's; that the Hawthornes and Dr. Tabor would rather advise Margaret (if she sought their protection, which was not sure) to keep quiet than to court fresh troubles; and then it occurred to him that Harry Redwood might possibly not let himself be caught. A great deal depended on this. If the rascal evaded the pursuit of the police the circumstances under which Nat Riddel died might remain permanently enshrouded in doubt.

The train went fast, and the gathering dusk gave Philip an excuse for closing his eyes as if he meant to take a nap. The Quaker and his son-in-law were conversing in low tones, and were looking together at an advertisement in a newspaper. Philip caught the words "Inquiry Office," "America," "Answers received," but could not

understand what they were talking about. Soon Blackbridge station was reached and the train stopped.

"We are going to alight here," said Dr. Tabor. "We will not invite you to come to Crossbridge, Colonel Forester, we should have very poor entertainment to offer you."

"Thank you, I must return to Tolminster," answered Philip. "Pray remember me to Mrs. Tabor."

"I must thank you in her name for the handsome fruit-basket you were kind enough to send us," continued the doctor, who had got out of the carriage. "She will take an opportunity of doing so herself if she has the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow."

"I am sorry Mrs. Tabor should be put to the trouble of going to the inquest," said Philip. "Good night."

A porter shut the door, and as the train steamed on Philip's greeting was answered by the Quaker, who cried benignly from the platform, "Good night, friend. God be with thee."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

WE will leave Philip Forester continuing his journey to Fairdale, while Dr. Tabor and the Quaker make their way home to Crossbridge, and we will join Michael Christy in the prison.

Michael seldom found time to peruse the newspapers until the evening, and since Nelly and Sir Wemyss had left his house to go on a visit to Fairdale he had no one to relate him the news of the day at luncheon. So in the ordinary course of things he would not have read about Nat Riddel's death until his day's work was over.

But the tidings which concerned Philip Forester so deeply brought dismay to two people at Tolminster—to Frank Christy, who foresaw the exposure that must result from Riddel's murder, and to Mrs. Baillie, who apprehended even worse things than Frank. When the matron read how the detective had been murdered by a dark man of military appearance, she jumped at once to a conclusion which proved how much recent events had excited her imagination. She guessed that the murderer must be Field, but she thought that he had also murdered Margaret, and that both these crimes had been committed at Forester's instigation, if not with his assistance.

She foresaw that she should lose her situation and be disgraced ; perhaps they would arrest her as an accomplice, and she would become an inmate of one of those cells over which she ruled. This idea made her wild with terror. A prison matron's thoughts travel swiftly between a crime and its punishment. It was Mrs. Baillie's experience that people who break the law in one point may break it in several, that the descent from the first to the lowest degrees of crime is rapid, that detection is sure ; and just as it cost her little to fancy Forester guilty of murder, it cost her less to picture him being brought to justice with all his abettors.

"Oh, why did I stoop to this?" she exclaimed, with a distracted moan, alone in her parlour, and she thought of Michael Christy.

He appeared now as something more than a friend, he might be her saviour. She had not seen him since he had questioned her about Margaret's letter, for she had remained in her apartments, being unwell. But now was the time to seek him and tell him the truth before he heard it from other lips than hers. Two new prisoners had been admitted over night, and this was the hour, after chapel service, when she ought to have taken them to be entered in the chaplain's books. Instead of doing so she went alone to the office. Michael was seated at his table, and quietly writing. His composure at such a moment, when the matron expected he would be all troubled by the morning's news, made her hesitate. But he looked up and said rather coldly, "I am glad to see you about again, Mrs. Baillie. Are you better?"

"Have you seen this morning's newspaper?" was her only answer.

"No," said he, surprised.

"Read this, please," she rejoined, and handed him the journal which she had brought.

He glanced quickly down the paragraph marked with her nail. "What's this?" he exclaimed, and rose to his feet. But he read to the end before he uttered another remark. Even then he seemed not to grasp the ill-news in all its bearings. He looked at the paragraph again, and suspicions began filtering through his mind slowly.

"This man who is dead seems to be the same who I employed," he said. "They describe him here as Colonel Forester's servant. Why then he must have deceived me!"

"He deceived you all through," cried Mrs. Baillie, in contrite agitation. "He was the Colonel's accomplice, and I foolishly aided them in their schemes, thinking I was acting for the best. Your brother was in the plot. We all worked together to get Margaret

Field out of prison. They assured me since that she had gone to America of her own accord."

"I don't understand you," said Michael. "In what did your plot consist? Margaret Field was released on the application of her husband."

"But he was not her husband."

"Who was he then?"

"I don't know; some adventurer whom Colonel Forester had hired."

"And you knew this?"

"I did not think Margaret would be placed in his power, but now all sorts of horrible fears have come over me. I am afraid it is that man who has murdered and robbed the detective, and I have even a worse fear——"

"Speak; what is that worse fear you have?"

"Oh, don't be harsh with me, Mr. Christy," cried the matron, dropping into a chair and clasping her hands. "I could never foresee all this; my intentions were good. If evil has alighted on that unhappy woman it is not my fault. I was duped as much as she, and after all I may be wrong; perhaps things are not so bad as I apprehend, perhaps Margaret Field is safe and well."

"Did you suspect then that she had met with foul play? Great God! is that what you mean?"

Mrs. Baillie made no reply, but burst into a passion of tears, which relieved her. The worst of her confession was past, and, woman-like, she felt safer now that she relied for guidance on a man. Michael had turned livid and almost sick. Margaret dead, and Frank mixed up in her murder, that was the situation as he saw it with appalling distinctness.

"I must see my brother," he said, in a guttural voice, which he struggled to keep steady, and it was as though he had said, "I must have my brother near me to defend him." The protective instinct of affection predominated in his mind, and all resentment against Frank was lost in the sense of his great danger.

He wrote off a note, closed it, and went out to send a warder with it to the barracks. He could not let the warder come into the room and see the prison matron crying. When he returned Mrs. Baillie was sighing heavily and drying her eyes. She would have liked him to go on questioning her, that she might find further relief in speech, but he began classing papers mechanically. He forgot to put questions. Thoughts were revolving in his brain like water round a mill-wheel. Mrs. Baillie supposed that he was too much disgusted for utterance, but even overt disgust would have been

preferable to this appearance of ignoring her presence. If he had been angry at her conduct she would at least have seen that she counted for something in his eyes.

She made another attempt at self-exculpation, and the rest of her story came out piecemeal. She spoke of her visit to Crossbridge, where she had been so strangely thrown in with Isaac Hawthorne and the Tabors. Michael started at hearing that Margaret's parents had been living so near him all this while, and he took down their address. Then Mrs. Baillie went on to speak of the theft of the portrait from Ivy House, and of its consequences in bringing her into relation with Colonel Forester. It had been needful to remove the portrait lest trouble should come of it, but all the people at Ivy House had been much afflicted at its disappearance.

"So that man Forester had the sad courage to destroy a father's only memorial of his lost child!" remarked Michael, bitterly.

"I think he regretted doing so," replied Mrs. Baillie, who was still sobbing. "He never appeared to me wishful to do wrong out of malice, and that was why I assisted him."

"Did it seem to you as if the Hawthornes were attached to their daughter? Would they have given her a home if she had applied to them?"

"I think so. They are good people."

"Yet you prevented her from writing to them?"

"Our plans were ripe for execution then, and any counter-movement on her part would have overturned them all. I thought that once free from prison she would be at liberty to communicate with her friends if she liked. Oh, Mr. Christy, I do assure you I acted from the best motives."

"You did as you were told; I don't blame you," replied Michael, drily.

The matron winced, for her vanity was stung to the quick by this rejoinder. The chaplain was treating her as though she were a servant who had no independent will of her own, and could not resist an order to do wrong when given her by a superior. Never before had she probed the depth of her degradation. She had thought she would have to submit to a scene of stern reproaches, and that when she had sufficiently cried the chaplain would be touched by her repentance and console her. Anything would have been better than this disdain. He seemed to rein in his emotions as if it were beneath his dignity to let her see what he felt.

Bridling up, she endeavoured to say something about her concern for his grief, but a cold look put her back in her proper place, and marked the distance that was thenceforth to separate her from

Michael Christy. For the future she was to be an untrusted subordinate in the chaplain's eyes, and nothing more.

"I will not trouble you further, Mrs. Baillie," he said; "I expect my brother, and I will see what is to be done." Saying this, he glanced at the door.

She walked out humiliated and distraught with anxiety, yet afraid to plead for pity lest she should seem to be merely begging that she might not be discharged from her situation. As she passed by the looking-glass she caught sight of her swollen eyes, red cheeks, and disordered hair, and saw that she presented an unlovely spectacle altogether.

When the door had closed Michael Christy raised his eyes and muttered a short prayer. "Show me my duty, O God, I beseech Thee, and give me strength to perform it." As yet he could not see where his duty lay. He could decide nothing until he had talked with Frank, over whom his heart yearned.

He had not long to wait for the latter's arrival, for the warder going down to the barracks met the dragoon walking towards the prison in his undress uniform. Immediately after parade Frank had set out to see Michael with the purpose of coming to some explanation. The morning's news had half stunned him. From the note which the warder put into his hand he gathered that all further attempts to deceive his brother would be useless, but not till he found himself in the chaplain's room did he discover the full extent of what Michael had learned and now suspected.

The chaplain's greeting was kind and exempt from reproaches; but in a few words he recapitulated all that Mrs. Baillie had told him, and stated his intention of immediately repairing to London to institute inquiries as to Margaret's fate. Frank indignantly repudiated the notion that Margaret had been murdered, but as he had only his faith in Forester's honour to urge on his side, the argument did not weigh much with Michael. There was a very stern look about the corners of the chaplain's mouth when he talked of Colonel Forester. For once Frank found his brother in the mood which may be called "holy wrath," the most terrible of wraths, deep, quiet, and not to be lightly appeased.

"What are you going to do?" he asked wistfully, as Michael put on his hat and drew on his black gloves. "How shall you act if you find Margaret all right?"

"Restore her to her parents."

"And if you don't find her?"

"She must be found, dead or alive."

"She may have left the country."

"Forester will have to prove that she went away of her own free will."

"He may be unable to prove it."

"The magistrates shall decide then how he must be treated."

"Do you mean to say you will have him arrested?"

"If I have not satisfactory proof of Margaret Field's whereabouts before to-morrow I shall give Forester into custody."

"Well, but give a fellow a chance," cried Frank, rebelling against such stern resolution. "If Margaret has left England on an allowance, as I have been told, it is a bargain between Forester and her which you have no right to upset. Have you considered what my position is in all this?"

"The position of a man who has acted very weakly and wrongly, I am afraid, Frank," answered Michael. "Why did you not tell me the truth when I confronted you with that poor woman?"

"Why were you so deuced officious in taking up the woman's case?" cried Frank, in irritation. "It is your fault if we were driven to expedients, when you set detectives on us."

"Would you have had me connive in your persecutions?"

"Persecutions! you talk of Madge Hawthorne as if she were a saint, whereas she is no more than a jade. I know those women, you don't."

There was a fire in the room; Frank sat down near it, unbuckling his sabre, and throwing it on the floor with a clatter.

"It is all your fault for acting like a Quixotic duffer," he repeated angrily. "A man has an entanglement with a girl; by-and-by he wants to get married, and he offers her money to leave him alone. Those things occur every day, and Madge would have been as happy over her five hundred a year as a cat over a plateful of fish, if you hadn't made her maudlin with your boshy sympathy and tracts. You parsons are always stirring up women to kick up rows. Do you think they are so much like angels, those females who howl in law-courts about seductions, breaches of promise, and kisses given them in railway carriages? If paradise is peopled with them it will be a nice place for the honest sort to live in. I wish to Heaven you could find Madge and marry her! When she takes to thrashing you with a red-hot poker you will discover what a treasure a hysteric wife is in a quiet household. A pretty mess you have brought us all into! If you had taken my denial and told Madge you didn't believe her story, everything would have come right, and this detective would not have been murdered."

Michael allowed his brother to ramble on, venting his wretchedness. The dragoon saw his prospects black enough, and trembled

at Nelly's sorrow if he should be disgraced. And disgrace seemed inevitable. He should have to throw up his commission; Dick Bool, Gayleard, and Buttery Jarnes would cut him; Sir Wemyss would forbid him to speak to Nelly again; and Nelly herself would shun him as a scoundrel. Better blow his brains out than submit to all that.

"Nelly will not shun you," said Michael, interrupting him at this point. "Go and tell her of your troubles. She will be your truest friend."

"I'll tell her nothing; least said soonest ended," said Frank, rising and buckling on his belt again. "If I am struck down I shan't defend myself—you shall have the pleasure of all hitting me together."

"There can be no satisfaction to me in accusing my own brother," said Michael, in a tone of affectionate sadness. "Recollect, however, when you do wrong that it is a mistake to leave God out of your calculations; He is an enemy more to be feared than those against whom evil-doers generally guard themselves. See how He has followed you in this affair, bringing to light things you imagined hidden, and raising up new dangers at every point where you hoped to find safety. By the memory of our dead mother, whom we hope to meet again, Frank, do your duty now: help me to try and find Margaret Field, and tell me the truth about her marriage that her reputation may be cleansed."

"You are asking me to turn against Forester now that he is in danger," replied Frank, with a frown; "I shan't do it."

"I am asking you to place yourself on the side of justice and truth," answered the chaplain. "By doing so you will enable me to plead some justification for your past errors."

"I do not accept that arrangement," demurred Frank, with misplaced pride; "I have no wish that you should make separate terms for me. I promised Forester that he and I should stand or fall together, and we shall."

"Well, then, I must do the best I can for you," said Michael, with a sigh. It grieved him to see that Frank was too obstinate to be reasoned with.

He left the room a moment to cross over to the surgery and ask Dr. Hardy for the address of Dr. Sprottle, whom he imagined to be the owner of the asylum to which Margaret had been removed; then he and Frank went out of the gaol together. Not a word was exchanged between them in the open air, but the dragoon's face was red, as if he had been drinking. He parted from his brother near the station, and strode moodily back to barracks. He had to

pass an inspection of recruits in their new clothes, and to sign the pay-books of his troop. He was thinking of suicide all the time. Honourable extrication from his troubles he saw none, and he thought that Nelly would love him more if he broke his head to escape disgrace than if he lived and let his shame kill him by inches in some foreign country, where he would be pining as an outlaw.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MICHAEL'S SEARCH.

It was nearly noon when Michael started from Tolminster, and half-past one when he arrived in London. This was on the Monday, the same day when Margaret had been taken out of the asylum, and about this very time when the chaplain had come to look for her Margaret was escaping from B—— Street, as we have already seen. Michael's first visit was to Dr. Sprottle.

The great authority on madness lived in Russell Square. The chaplain arrived at his house as he was sitting down to luncheon after an arduous debate at some scientific institute, where he had read a phrenological paper certifying by an examination of the busts of the twelve Cæsars that nine of them must have been stark mad. This proposition had been controverted by six other doctors, who cared nothing about the twelve Cæsars, but were glad to vex Sprottle by arguing that the maddest of the twelve were the three whom he had pronounced sane. The great authority's plumes were all ruffled by the heat of the contest. His blue, speckled neckcloth was awry, his greyish red crest stood erect, and he strode, *cluck-clucking*, into his study as if he were ready to try his spurs on any cock or hen who might turn up next. Not having been to Dr. Billing's since the previous Saturday, Dr. Sprottle thought Mrs. Field was still there, and launched out into an eulogy of the establishment. Just the place for a homicidal maniac—supervision without restraint, quiet without dullness, energetic treatment without mortification. Mrs. Field was undergoing the water cure; hers was a bad case, but curable in his hands, and Mr. Christy had better not see her, lest she should try to strangle him as she did Billing, he believed, on the day of her arrival. Indispensable that

she should be seen, was it? In that case here was Sprottle's card, which Billing would honour by admitting the chaplain at once, and good-day. Michael departed, wondering in what special category of lunatics he should himself be classed if ever Sprottle were free'd to examine him.

He was intensely relieved to hear that Margaret was still in the asylum. Coming up in the train, he had had leisure to reflect that it was improbable Philip Forester would have caused her to be murdered, such a crime being too desperate to be undertaken without precautions that would insure its secrecy. But this did not alter his opinion of Forester's villany. He boiled with indignation to think of the agonies Margaret must have suffered at being handed over to a ruffian and reviled as mad for denying that he was her husband. Such an outrage was enough to affect her brain in earnest, and Michael thought meanly of himself for not having suspected the diabolical plot.

They had compelled him to think her insane, but her image dwelt in his mind as full of grace and beauty, and her aberration had always been holy in his sight as the fruit of sorrow. It shocked him to hear her spoken of as a lunatic—word of moonstruck meaning which conjures up ludicrous cries and gambols. He rather attached to her madness the poetical idea of the ancients, who saluted the insane as being in mystic communion with the gods. He had never doubted that she would be cured, and now his deep sympathy for her misfortunes was strengthened by the conviction that she had never been of unsound mind at all.

"How will she receive me?" he conjectured; and he was prepared for a great deal of ill-will on her part, considering how his abandonment of her cause must have shaken her faith in his honesty. He had not entered into explanations with Dr. Sprottle as to his motives in seeking Mrs. Field, for it was not worth while bandying words with such a creature. His plans were to inform Margaret of how her sad story had come to light, and then to communicate with her relatives, who would take the necessary steps to remove her from the asylum. Once she was safe under their care he would appeal to her to show mercy towards his brother.

So he reached Dr. Billing's asylum, and was ushered into a luxurious drawing-room. Everything about the place prepossessed him favourably, it looked so home-like. There was a smooth lawn, a well-raked gravel sweep, some parrots on their perches, a pet dog who rose from the hearth-rug and wagged his tail. Then Dr. Billing appeared, bland and unctuous, and Michael's first impression of him was good also.

Billing had a talent for conveying to the friends of a patient that this particular patient was the object of his unceasing solicitude by day and night. You would have thought he spent hours by the afflicted one's bedside, and played the mandolin to soothe him in his waking hours. He spoke of Margaret as the "poor, dear lady," and of her case as the most interesting that had ever engrossed his attention. But he staggered Michael by announcing that Mrs. Field was no longer under his roof.

"The poor, dear lady left us this morning to try the benefit of a change of air. Her husband wrote to say he would take her to see some friends in the North."

"He is not her husband," exclaimed Michael, excitedly. "There has been a gross imposture here, Dr. Billing. Did the man come himself to fetch Mrs. Field?"

"No; he directed me to send her to his house in B—— Street," replied the doctor, looking blue. "I think I have his letter in my pocket."

"How long was this ago?"

"The lady went away from here at about ten o'clock, in charge of two attendants."

"Have they returned yet?"

"I presume so, but I will ring and inquire."

"Will you please allow me to question those attendants, Dr. Billing. I have reason to fear that a crime has been committed. Every moment's delay may do mischief."

Dr. Billing, seeing his visitor in such agitation, consented, but his own equanimity was much disturbed; and from that moment he drew himself in metaphorically like a turtle under its shell. If there was one thing this doctor disliked above others it was a scandal that might bring the secrets of his house under public comment. He went out to fetch the two attendants, but schooled them peremptorily as to what questions they should answer, and what others duck away from. Dr. Billing was not unctuous with his servants.

When Bridget Puckram and Jemima Horris trudged into the drawing-room with their stony faces, they were ready armed. Dr. Billing remained present, and put smooth, leading queries to elicit how violent Mrs. Field had been, how reckless and unreasonable in her accusations. It caused Michael excruciating pain to hear all this, inferring from it, as he did, that Margaret's patience had entirely given way under repeated denial of justice. But he mentally commended Jemima as a good girl because she said she had watched over the poor, dear lady as a sister.

"Mrs. Field flung her arms round me and didn't want to go away from here, sir," whined the girl. "She said, 'Oh, Jemima, dear, you're the only friend I've met with for years.'"

"She was very grateful, she was, the poor lady, for all the trouble we took about her," chimed in Bridget.

"A-sitting up by her bedside as I did several nights, sir, when she couldn't sleep," continued Jemima.

"And getting her what vittles she liked, for she was very partic'lar about her vittles," added Bridget. "The best of what was in the kitchen had to go up to her table, for Dr. Billing always says the patients are to have what they asks for, sir. It's the way of this 'ouse."

"I strive to make my patients feel as much as possible as if they were at home," remarked the doctor, in a mellifluous tone, to which Michael gave a nod of assent.

"I am sure you do," he said; "but what I want to know is whether Mrs. Field's husband was in B—— Street when she went there."

"No, sir; leastways, we didn't see him," said Jemima. "It was Captain Field's servant that gave us our orders to come back."

"What sort of a man is that servant?"

"Tall; not so tall, though, as you, sir, and poek-marked," replied Bridget.

"Did he tell you whether Mrs. Field was to spend the night in that house?"

"He didn't say much, sir, except to ask us whether Dr. Billing had seen Captain Field this morning," said Jemima. "He seemed to fancy the Captain might have come himself to fetch his lady out of the asylum, but we told him he hadn't."

"Apparently, then, Captain Field was not in the house at the time?"

The servants looked at each other and began to stumble in their answers, for they had only been coached in the particulars that concerned Margaret's sojourn in the asylum, and Dr. Billing, who had edged half behind the chaplain, was frowning to them to hold their tongues. Michael, however, gathered from their prevarications that Captain Field's servant had seemed uneasy as to what had become of his master, and this set him hoping that Field might have absconded after the murder of Riddel without waiting to see Margaret. He thanked the attendants, who withdrew. Dr. Billing would have been glad to interrogate him as to what crime he suspected, but Michael was in a hurry to be off. His hansom was waiting. As Dr. Billing's asylum stood outside the London postal

district, the distance to Soho was far, but the cabman's speed being accelerated by the promise of extra pay, an hour's fast driving brought him to B—— Street. One need not dwell on his anxieties during the journey.

The dusk of a winter afternoon was deepening, and the lamp-lighters were abroad, but the house where Michael hoped to find Margaret was shut up. There was not a light in the windows, not a soul on the premises to answer the bell. The street itself was lonely and dismal. The cabman, as he rubbed down his reeking horse with a wisp of straw, glanced up at the house with a shrug, as though it were just in the nature of things that so musty a habitation should be tenantless.

When Michael had knocked several times in vain the door of the neighbouring house opened, and a slatternly woman put her head out.

"It's no use knocking there," she said; "the house has been shut up these three years."

"Three years! why I was told that a lady had come there to-day."

"A mad-woman broke some windows there two weeks ago, I know, and some gentlemen have been coming there off and on, but nobody sleeps there."

Here a child's voice spoke behind the woman. "Yes they do, mother; and a lady came to-day in a cab."

"Did you see her, my boy?" asked Michael, addressing the child, who appeared, holding his mother's gown.

"Yes, sir; and afterwards another cab came with a gem'man inside, and then another; there have been several cabs come to-day."

While Michael stood irresolute, his mind filling with the gloomiest forebodings, a big, gasping wench came tearing along the pavement, till she arrived close to Michael, when she stopped and leaned against the area railings, panting and sobbing. This woman was Betsy Dormer, who had been rambling three hours through the streets of London, hoping to find the fugitive Margaret. Seeing Michael on the doorstep, she took him for a friend of Redwood's and addressed him beseechingly, her eyes jutting from her head as she did so.

"Has the master come back? Tell him it warn't my fault, will yer? She slipped from me afore I had time to guess what she was arter."

"Who slipped from you?" asked Michael, eagerly.

"Why the mad-'ooman. Oh! I'm ready to faint."

"Do you mean Mrs. Field? Are you the servant who was to take charge of her?"

"They left her alone with me," cried Betsy, who, what with fatigue, hunger, and thirst, was in a lamentable plight, and aimed more at self-justification than at giving coherent answers. "They didn't ought to have left me alone, for I couldn't be in two places at once. She came down and asked me whether there was any one in the house. 'No,' says I. Then says she, 'Will you get me a glass of water?' So I goes downstairs, seeing her so quiet, and I was no sooner in the kitchen than she was out through the front door in no time. I heard the door slam, and I ran up, dropping the glass, which broke all to pieces. Right out into the street I went, hallooing, 'Stop thief!' and if I'd a-caught her I'd 'ave twisted her neck as they told me to do; aye, I'd not have left her agin, I wouldn't, if I'd had to sit on her in the road. But she was out of sight, and I couldn't catch her. The people kept asking me, 'Who are you a-looking for?' but I ran from street to street, and I haven't took a rest nor a drop of drink from then till now. Tell the master, will yer, that it warn't my fault? It all came along o' that pock-marked chap a-going out of the 'ouse without locking the door."

"Then Mrs. Field is at large?" asked Michael, with ill-suppressed joy.

"She's a-gone," said Betsy, sulkily. It displeased her to hear the woman called "Mrs. Field." "If she's master's wife it serves him right for having took such a 'ooman. What's the use of a wife that must be tied up by the leg so that she mayn't bolt? Oh my, I must go into the 'ouse now and rest, for I'm dead beat. Doan't let the master hit me, sir."

"Have you a key to the house?" asked Michael.

"Yes, I've a key, unless it's dropped out o' my pocket," said the girl, fumbling in her dress, whence she presently extracted the article.

The severity of Betsy Dormer's hunt through the streets of London was amply attested by the condition of her person and attire. Her gown was clotted with mud up to the knees, she had no bonnet or shawl, and her hair fell over her perspiring face like bits of wet string. It subsequently came out that she had stopped at least fifty women in the streets, that she had several times been nearly run over, and that she had been repeatedly threatened by the police, who thought her drunk. The cabman, the neighbour, and her boy stared at her with astonishment, and endeavoured to overhear what she was saying to the clergyman, but Michael balked their curiosity by telling her more than once to speak in a lower tone. When she had found her key he questioned her as to her name, ordered her to open the door, and followed her into the house.

He had no intention of parting company with Betsy until she should have undergone a strict examination by the police, to ascertain how far she was cognizant of Captain Field's recent doings, and implicated in them.

They entered the parlour, and Betsy threw herself into a chair, groaning about her legs, which could no longer support her. The room was almost dark, but the sudden lighting of a street-lamp on the pavement just opposite cast a glare sufficient to make every object distinguishable. Michael had bared his head. The house in which Margaret had suffered so much was sacred to him. He had heard at the asylum how a strait-waistcoat had been put on her because of her violence, and he seemed to hear, in the silence, the faint echo of her cries for mercy as she struggled with her tormentors. He asked Betsy where the drawing-room was, and went upstairs, wishing to get a clear idea of the scene that had occurred when Margaret had broken the window-panes. In the passage he saw a box, which he recognized as the one he had often seen in Margaret's prison cell. A cloak of hers was lying on it, and on the floor was a glove which she must have dropped in her flight. Michael picked up the glove and held it just an instant; then he laid it on the cloak without raising it to his lips. Was he reflecting that Margaret was a married woman?

CHAPTER L.

A CHARGE OF MURDER.

Now at this moment Edward Jasper was in the house. He had tarried to collect his luggage and to search the premises to see if Field had left any scrap of paper which could compromise Colonel Forester. This had taken him a couple of hours; but he had just finished, and was about to leave the house with a valise in his hand when he heard Michael's knock at the door. He did not deem it prudent to answer. His first notion was that the police had come to seek for Field, and he thought of betaking himself over a wall in a back-yard which led to some mews, and of making his escape that way. He had placed a ladder in readiness an hour previously in view of a sudden surprise, and he was an active climber, who could have got away without difficulty.

But the knocking stopped. Uncertain what to do, he stole up to the drawing-room and peered cautiously out of the window, where he saw the cab and Betsy, but not the man with whom she was talking. In a few moments more the door opened, and he heard Betsy in conversation below with a man whose voice he took for Captain Frank Christy's. The voices of Michael and his brother were much alike, so were their figures and statures. Jasper dropped his valise, and came downstairs confidently to meet his master's best friend, but half-way down he recognized in the clerically-attired stranger the chaplain of Tolminster Gaol, Colonel Forester's most dreaded enemy. Then he tried to retreat, but it was too late. Though Michael could not see well in the half light, he heard steps above him, and bounded up the stairs.

The two met on the landing.

"Who are you?"

"I'll ask the same of you. What business have you in this house?"

"My name is Christy, and I am here to look for Mrs. Field. Are you Captain Field's servant?"

"What if I am?"

"I take you into custody for being concerned in a conspiracy, and perhaps a murder."

"Stand aside, Mr. Christy. If you lay hands on me——"

"Betsy, open the door and tell the cabman to call a policeman," cried Michael, resolutely, over the staircase, and he caught Jasper by the collar with a grip of iron.

The dialogue had been conducted rapidly, as the thrusts and parries of men fencing. Jasper made a bound to free himself, but he had to deal with an old university oarsman a dozen years younger than himself, and in the prime of his strength. Though he himself was strong, he could do little by main force, and tried cunning by giving his adversary a crook in the leg. This obliged Michael to use more violence than he had contemplated. He shoved Jasper back and pinned him against the wall, loudly repeating his cry to Betsy. Betsy, who heard the noise of struggling, came out of the parlour, terrified, and at this moment Jasper, who was throttling, roared, "Murder!" The girl ran out in a panic and shouted "Murder!" to the cabman, who caught up the cry and waved his arms to some passers-by. In a moment the street was filled with the alarm. Some people threw up windows, others came up areas. A potman, a costermonger, some mechanics returning home from work, hurried towards the house, and, last of all, a policeman hastened also.

Meanwhile Edward Jasper, forgetting all prudence, and carried away by brutal anger, had dealt Michael a heavy kick. The chaplain would not strike him in return, but tightened his grip. On Jasper's lashing out a second time Michael raised his foot, caught him under the ankle, and, causing him to lose his balance, brought him heavily to the floor. Powerless to move, Jasper was sobered. "I'll give in," he gasped. "I've nothing to be afraid of; I've done no harm." But this utterance tallied so ill with his previous actions that Michael would not trust him, and, forcing him out flat on his back, placed a knee on his chest, and kept him down till assistance arrived.

Half-a-dozen men had rushed up the stairs in the semi-obscurity, and a policeman appeared among them. A call was raised for lights, and Betsy Dormer arrived trembling with a candle. She had feared a moment that it was Redwood who had been trying to murder the clergyman, or the clergyman who was taking the life of Redwood, she knew not which, so that on seeing Jasper she heaved a big sigh of relief. By this time Jasper was on his legs, held by several zealous pairs of hands, and the policeman was putting handcuffs on him, a formality which he resisted.

"I'm not a criminal," he blurted out. "What are you chaining me for?"

"What's the charge against him, sir?" asked the policeman of Michael, whom he perceived to be a clergyman.

"Conspiracy, and I believe he has had a hand in the St. Pancras murder," said Michael, limping aside, for the kick had hurt him.

"No, I haven't!" exclaimed Jasper, indignantly. "Your brother knows me, Mr. Christy, and he can tell I'm an honest man. My name is Edward Jasper."

"Colonel Forester's servant?" asked Michael, with a start, as he scanned the man's features.

"Yes; and I've served in the Guards and the 42nd Highlanders. I had two medals and three good conduct stripes."

"If you be Edward Jasper that is reason the more for securing you," said Michael, quickly. But the revelation of the prisoner's identity took him aback. The connection between Forester and the murder of Riddel seemed now too evident.

"If this man has had anything to do with the St. Pancras murder I had best take him to Scotland Yard, sir," remarked the policeman, who had fastened the handcuffs, and held the prisoner by an arm.

Michael assented, and requested somebody to fetch a four-wheeled cab. He wiped his brow, for the tussle had been severe.

"I will take charge of this girl myself," he added, showing Betsy Dormer. "She can go with me in the hansom."

"What are you a-going to take me for?" whimpered Betsy, pale and frightened.

"Only to give evidence," answered Michael; and he tried to soothe the girl, who began blubbing aloud. This day was the most evil she had ever met in her calendar.

A large crowd had collected in the street, for whenever there is anything unusual to be witnessed tens soon multiply into hundreds. Wild rumours were of course flying about. The people who had entered the house communicated scraps of untruth to those outside, who passed them on, with embellishments, to the people further on. More policemen arrived, and, after some delay, a four-wheeled cab ploughed its way to the door. Curiosity was stimulated when the news was bruited that the St. Pancras murderer had been caught, but it was curiosity unminged with anger. The people stared; there was none of that hooting and execration which is directed against murderers of women or children, whose crimes seem cowardly to the popular mind. A detective murdered counts as an enemy the less to many of the persons who compose street mobs.

Presently Jasper was brought out, handcuffed, between two policemen, who had cried to the crowd to stand back. They had some difficulty in getting into the cab by reason of the throng. The people pushed and stood on tiptoe to obtain a sight of the criminal, such as could not struggle to the front consoling themselves by jeers and hustling. Michael came behind, walking a little lame, with Betsy, who was in a sad way. The darkness, the noise, the sight of the crowd, and the talk of murder had all wrought upon her nerves, so that she could not climb into the hansom unassisted. When the vehicle moved off she put her handkerchief to her eyes and sobbed herself into a fit of hicoughs. Michael was reflecting on the hideous aspect of crime—its invariable association with all that is coarse and low. He left the house in B—— Street in possession of some policemen, who had already work to do in preventing loafers from filching articles out of the parlour.

The two cabs drove first to the district police office, where a summary report was made to the sergeant on duty. This took a little time. Then they went to Scotland Yard. This chief metropolitan office is accustomed to see criminals of all sorts cross its threshold, so that their arrival usually causes no stir. They are placed in a dock in the office, beyond the first door to the right after you have passed the archway; they are searched, and then relegated to some cells at the back. But Edward Jasper, as the suspected murderer of

a detective, was an object of interest to other detectives. Two or three officers in plain clothes came to have a good look at him. The inspector on duty rang a bell, and a chief-superintendent hurried down. At this moment Michael had just handed his card to the inspector, and was preparing to state his charge. He felt the awful importance of the act of duty he was about to accomplish. Jasper, glaring at him over the dock, looked as if he could not believe that the chaplain was going to charge him with a conspiracy in which his own brother was involved.

It was certainly an incongruous situation, but its incongruity had not struck Michael till then. He had acted on the spur of the moment, not wishing to let an accomplice of Forester's slip; but now his sense of justice told him that Frank ought to be standing in that dock beside Jasper. He had no proof that Jasper had committed murder: he was only there to accuse him of having kidnapped and ill-used Margaret. But what was the guilt of this man—a mere humble instrument—as compared with that of Forester and Frank? Obviously, in the course he was taking, he must be prepared to see his brother brought to justice as the greater criminal.

He groaned in spirit, but to his surprise and inexpressible gratitude he was not called upon to make any charge. Jasper had found other accusers. The chief superintendent—a well-dressed, rather pompous man, with an affected voice—scrutinized the prisoner through a double eye-glass, and said, "Your name is Edward Jasper? A warrant was—ahem—issued against you this afternoon on the charge of murdering Nathaniel Riddel."

"Who applied for the warrant, sir?" asked Jasper, in a choking voice, though he had become quite tranquil and defiant.

"The police—ahem—applied for the warrant on information supplied to them by one Thomas Buckster, of the Grenadier Guards, and by Sergeant Jerkin, a recruiting pensioner," said the chief superintendent, consulting a paper. "Do you know those persons?"

"Yes, sir," said Jasper, with a sudden colour, "and they ought to know me better."

"You are not on your trial; you need not defend yourself now," continued the official; "I am only stating on what information you are charged. It is alleged that you—ahem—deserted from the—th Hussars, and underwent three months' imprisonment in 1867."

"In 1867?" interrupted Michael; "was it in the latter part of the year?"

"From August to November," answered the superintendent, turning round with a "who are you?" expression.

"That doesn't make me out to be a murderer," protested Jasper, with the warmth of a man falsely accused. Michael was thinking that it proved him a perjurer, for having sworn that he had never left Colonel Forester's service during nine years, but he kept the observation to himself.

The superintendent went on: "The—a—information against you states that Buckster and Jerkin were both applied to recently for particulars respecting your past life. The applicant was Nathaniel Riddel, and he was told that you had been a deserter. The presumption is that you murdered him because he meant to use that knowledge against you; but that is, of course, only a hypothesis. You will be confronted with the servant-girl of 15, Peterborough Street, who saw the murderer, and a great deal will depend on her evidence."

"I should like to see that young woman, sir," said Jasper.

"You shall see her at once. She is in my office at this moment," replied the superintendent, with a little cough of self-complacency.

At this silence fell on all present. The gas threw its glare on the scene, and lit up every corner of the crime-haunted room. The white-washed walls were covered with handbills describing stolen property, dead bodies found in the Thames, and missing children; whilst others offered rewards of £100 for the apprehension of murderers. Over the mantel-piece hung some constables' staves, two or three pairs of handcuffs, and some leg-irons used for convicts of the dangerous sort. Everybody in the room looked suspicious and inquisitive. There were the two policemen in their helmets, long coats, and gaiters; half-a-dozen detectives with cold, keen eyes; and the inspector, in a braided coat and with a pen behind his ear, who had a trick of shaking his head, as though incredulously, at everything he heard said by anybody except the superintendent. Betsy Dormer had sunk on a wooden bench behind Michael, and continued to weep with her knuckles in her eyes. Whenever the chaplain moved she stood up and kept close to him, as if nervous lest he should leave her alone.

The superintendent went out, and whilst he was gone Jasper's handcuffs were removed; he was ordered out of the dock, and told to mix as he pleased with the detectives. A few minutes later a girl, dressed in a housemaid's Sunday finery, was introduced by the superintendent, who requested her aloud to see if she could identify the accused murderer. As a necessary precaution, he enjoined her not to be flurried. These attempts at recognition are seldom quite fair. If a witness—especially an ignorant, excited girl—has not retained the clearest recollection of a suspected person's features, she

is prone to fasten on the individual who wears the guiltiest look. Now Jasper, with his square jaw and pock-marked face, had an unprepossessing appearance, besides which, he was flushed and ill at ease, while the detectives among whom he stood were cool and at home; on the other hand, the girl, who had caught but a passing glimpse of Harry Redwood, had been so badgered with questions all day, she had been so frightened, cautioned, confused, that her memory had got decomposed into fancies. No sooner did she see Jasper than she uttered a squeal and recoiled, putting her hands before her eyes, which were swollen from a day's crying. "Oh, oh, that's 'im," she raved. She was perfectly sincere. She could not have identified Harry Redwood now; but having once sworn to Jasper, she would stick to her oath to the end with the obstinacy of the weak and ignorant.

Jasper, who was not of enduring mood, lost patience and broke out into a blunt oath.

"Come and look at me closer, will yer?" he shouted, with a violence which only set the girl the more against him. "Do you mean to say that I was at your house yesterday morning?"

"Oh yes, you were: it's you that did it," snivelled the girl, backing away.

"That's the d——st lie you ever told. Why I never left B—— Street the whole day, and here's a woman who can swear it. Betsy Dormer, can't you swear that I was in the house along o' you all yesterday?"

But Betsy had lost her memory too. "I dunno. I didn't see yer. You told me you was going out to buy a noospaper."

"That was this morning, you fool. Where's your wits gone?"

"No, it was yesterday too. I went out and in and never saw yer for hours," cried Betsy, hysterically. She was as sincere as the other housemaid. Here were two women prepared to swear a fellow-creature's life away in all conscience.

"Who is this—a—female?" asked the superintendent, surveying Betsy through his glasses.

"She was found in the house where Jasper was captured," answered Michael.

"Oh, she must be detained then;" and the chief made a sign to the detectives. Two of them approached Jasper and began to search him; two others took Betsy by the elbows and ordered her to come along. Betsy set up a fearful shrieking and tried to grasp Michael's arm for protection, but she was unceremoniously shoved through a door which closed behind her, and her screams died away in the distance. Jasper offered no resistance to the men who were

rifling his pockets, but he was white with fury, and turned suddenly upon Michael like a beast of prey.

"It's you who want to get me hung, is it? Maybe your brother, who's a better gentleman than you, will stop that game. But mind you, I'll go to the gallows sooner than say anything that would harm my master—so I tell you!"

He was led out, striding with an injured air, and none of the bystanders felt any doubt as to his guilt.

Michael himself felt none. The servant-girl's evidence sounded conclusive, and he could only thank Heaven that Margaret had escaped from the hands of this malefactor, who had possibly intended murdering her too. But what about Captain Field's disappearance? Could it be that Forester had planned to get rid of both his principal accomplices, and that Field's corpse would soon be found, adding one more item to this long tale of horrors?

Michael's thoughts whirled in a horrible reverie, and he expected to hear that warrants had been issued against Forester and Frank. In the dread of being interrogated he wished to be gone and warn his brother to take to flight. It had already come to this! He quaked when the superintendent touched his arm and requested a word with him in private.

They retired to an upper room, where they were alone. There the superintendent, who had ascertained his name, thanked him for his important capture, and begged him to be seated.

"You will be the—a—chief witness in this mysterious case, Mr. Christy," he said in his drawling voice. "You are aware that the coroner will call you at the inquest to-morrow?"

"No. Why am I to be called?"

"The Gehazis, Riddel's employers, say that the man was working for you latterly, and your evidence may throw a light on the circumstances that led to the murder."

"Shall I be obliged to state for what purposes I employed Riddel?"

"I—a—think so decidedly in the interests of justice. Would you mind telling me?"

"I would rather reserve my evidence."

"Very proper. Ahem. This will be a bad business for Colonel Forester, who is your friend, I believe."

"He is not my friend. Do you suspect him of being accessory to——"

"Oh dear—a—no. I only meant that as Jasper is his valet, and Riddel an old servant of his, as he says, the whole thing is tire-

some." The superintendent appeared shocked at the idea that he could suspect Colonel Forester.

"Do you think there is enough evidence to convict Jasper," inquired Michael, after a pause.

"Your own testimony will doubtless supply what deficiency there is as yet ; but for my part, I think the facts revealed by—a—Thomas Buckster are ample," replied the superintendent, who went on to state how this guardsman, reading the case in the papers that morning, had come up from Windsor to hunt up Sergeant Jerkin, and how both had agreed that no man could have such abundant motive as Jasper for making away with Riddel. The superintendent did not mention Frank Christy's name, nor Field's, nor Margaret's. Though he must have been aware of the Fairdale assault-case, he did not seem to have established any connexity between it and this new affair. Nevertheless, thought Michael, this might be only part of his dissimulation as a policeman.

The chaplain was allowed to depart at length. The superintendent perceived that he was growing fidgety, and renounced his purpose of pumping him.

Michael had not eaten since morning, and the pain of his leg was very great, for growing men cannot bear a savage kick on the shins so blithely as schoolboys, whose bones are elastic. No man could have been so dejected as Michael when he left Scotland Yard ; but he went forth to begin new tasks, for the hour when he could take rest had not come yet.

Before morning he must see Margaret's relatives.

It was late ; he calculated that he could hardly reach Crossbridge before eleven, but as the whole of Margaret's story must transpire before the coroner on the morrow, it was essential that he should try to disarm the wrath of the Hawthornes and Tabors against Frank. This might be done by telling them everything in private before they heard the story publicly in court ; but it could be done in no other way. Even this was a precarious venture, for Margaret might already have taken refuge among her parents, incensing them with the tale of her wrongs ; and Michael remembered the oath she had sworn to wreak her vengeance on Frank whenever she should have the power.

He did not acknowledge to himself that he was animated in his present enterprise by a wish to set himself right with Margaret and her family ; in truth, his anxiety about his brother overshadowed every personal consideration. Frank in prison, Frank ruined and forced to fly the country in disgrace,—the thought was more than

he could bear ; but it was worse than all to think that Frank's most implacable foe was Margaret.

With such harrowing meditations was the chaplain's brain enfevered as he was being driven to the railway station.

CHAPTER LI.

MICHAEL'S ERRAND.

WE left Isaac Hawthorne and Dr. Tabor making their way to Ivy House after parting with Forester at Blackbridge station. From Blackbridge to Crossbridge there lay two miles, and as the Quaker and his son-in-law walked side by side down the country roads they continued the conversation which they commenced in the train, and of which Forester had caught fragments without understanding them.

They were talking of an advertisement which they had inserted in the *Times* for the recovery of Sybil (or Margaret) Hawthorne.

It will be recollected that Dr. Tabor had made up his mind to advertise, or at least to employ an Inquiry Office to do so for him. The advertisement had appeared, but it had escaped the notice both of Forester and of Michael Christy, owing to the fact that at that date the agony columns of the *Times* occupied nearly a whole page. The siege of Paris was still being carried on, and thousands of French people used the leading English journal as a vehicle for correspondence with beleaguered friends in the French capital. Mr. Washburne, the American minister in Paris, was allowed, by the courtesy of the German commanders, to receive his newspapers every day, and he used to give the outer sheet of the *Times* to the Parisians to be reprinted in all their journals. There were days when the agony advertisements (no misnomer while the city was being bombarded) could be counted by the thousand.

Among so many which Michael had no interest in perusing, the following was not likely to attract his special attention.

"SYBIL H——, who left her home in 1867, and subsequently wrote from Woolwich to say that she had married and was going to America, is earnestly entreated to communicate with her family.

Father, mother, sister, all join their prayers, and send their love. If this should catch the eye of any person having known Sybil H——, a reward will be given for information respecting her on application to Messrs. Gehazi, — Street, London. American papers please copy."

To this appeal a dozen answers had been returned.

The number of domestic dramas of which the world hears nothing must be very great, for any vaguely-worded advertisement about missing relatives is sure to evoke replies from persons who fancy it concerns them when it does not. Several Sybils who had left their homes wrote expressing their readiness to be welcomed back, but none gave the information which the denizens of Ivy House wistfully sought. The Quaker took patience, reasoning that the advertisement must have time to reach America before it could bring a clue to his lost child. He had never doubted that Sybil had gone over the Atlantic, for it was not his habit to suspect deceit.

Dr. Tabor felt less sure, and the more he reflected on his sister-in-law's conduct the less hopeful was he of hearing good tidings of her. He was schooling himself to hear anything in the way of shame. But this did not prevent him from giving a kind concurrence to all the affectionate anticipations which the Quaker formed.

The old man had begun to talk of his child's return as a certainty, because he had dreamed several times that she had come back. A positivist might have said that he dreamed because he so often thought about Sybil, but Isaac Hawthorne contended that dreams were not sent in vain.

"She hath appeared to me these two nights," he said gravely to the doctor; "and yesterday as I took her in my arms she called herself our Prodigal Daughter."

The two were a little tired when they reached Ivy House, where Mrs. Tabor and her mother were awaiting them in some anxiety to hear what had come of their journey to London. While tea was preparing Dr. Tabor went to his dressing-room to change his coat and boots, and Violet followed him. He gave her an outline of all that had occurred, and she listened intently. The murder had shocked her painfully, and all day long she had discussed the newspaper account of it with her mother and some neighbours who had dropped in to ply her with questions. Some of these persons had asked to be shown the room in which the murdered "Johnson" had slept. From gossiping Violet had passed to surmises, and as feminine surmises fly from point to point as rapidly as a bird hops from twig to twig, she had come to the same conclusion as her

father, that Riddel must have had some hand in the disappearance of her picture.

• Her husband told her to dismiss such notions, as they might bring inconvenience. It was always unsafe to start conjectures which, exaggerated by third parties, might lead to the forming of accusations against innocent persons.

"But, dear, Mr. Vigus agrees with us," insisted Violet. "He says that he heard steps on the night when the theft was committed, and if Ruth was not guilty then it must have been this man with two names."

"I don't believe a word of it," replied the doctor. "Why should this man have stolen our picture?"

"I don't know I am sure, dear, unless he had taken a fancy to it."

"You forget that steps were heard in the garden too, so that the thief, whoever he was, had a confederate. Is it your theory that this second man fancied our portrait too?"

"They may have thought it valuable."

"Our silver spoons were much more so, but they let them alone."

Violet was silenced, but not convinced.

"This will have been an eventful month," she said with a sigh.

"It is horrible news to me that I must go to the inquest to-morrow. What shall I say to the coroner?"

"Tell him the truth."

"Must I speak to him about the picture?"

"Not unless he asks you about it."

"Will they oblige me to see the murdered man?"

"I am afraid so, dear. You will be wanted to speak to his identity."

Violet shuddered.

"I do not like to leave the children alone in this house with mamma and the servants after what has happened. I think we had better all go up to London together."

"You will only be away a few hours, dear, and we can ask Vigus to stay in the house."

"But will not Mr. Vigus have to attend the inquest too?"

"I did not mention that he was here, so that the coroner has not called him."

"If Mr. Vigus will come and stay in the house I shall be reassured, else I could not leave the children," declared Violet. "I feel as if the house were unsafe."

Dr. Tabor consoled her. She had best not excite herself by talking too much about these horrors, he said. The truth is, being a just man, who was afraid to let his thoughts carry him too far, he

would have been glad to dismiss the murder from his mind altogether until a clearer light had been thrown upon it. There had sprung up in him a sudden distrust of Colonel Forester for which he could not account, and which he would have been sorry for his wife to guess.

Having put on his slippers, Dr. Tabor went downstairs to kiss his children and take tea. The urn was hissing in the parlour, and Violet had provided a substantial meal, appetizing to hungry men.

While the family were at table all gloomy conversation was put aside, because of the children. The two little mites had asked to have their tea postponed, so that they might take it with their father as usual; but their eyes blinked drolly, for it was past their time for going to bed. Their mother led them off to the nursery when she saw that they bade fair to go to sleep in their chairs, so family prayers were not held at eight that evening, as the custom was, but were put off till later.

After tea there was an adjournment to the drawing-room, and soon Mr. Vigus dropped in to hear the news. His habitual cheerfulness had not forsaken him, though days were slipping by without his being able to find a curacy. His face was still patched here and there with white sticking-plaister, and he was very wet, for the rain had begun to fall. His dog Touzel accompanied him, and made for the hearthrug, wagging his tail to the company. Some satisfactory applications of coal-tar soap had relieved him of the nimble parasites who had been wont to disturb the pleasure which his presence caused, and he rubbed his nose against the Quaker's gaiters as if he knew that he was welcome.

"Friend Vigus, come near the fire and warm thyself," said Isaac Hawthorne; "I have somewhat to ask thee touching that night when our Sybil's portrait was taken."

Then it was impossible to avoid talking of the murder again. Everything that had been said about it was said again, for Peter Vigus was curious to hear what tidings had been brought from London, while the Quaker was anxious to extract from the young clergyman an opinion that would tally with his theory as to Nathaniel Riddel's possible somnambulism. Mrs. Hawthorne, who spoke little, sat opposite her husband, knitting a child's sock; Violet was cutting out the pattern of a frock for her boy; Dr. Tabor, seated with his hands in his pockets, was gazing reflectively at the spot on the wall where the portrait had hung.

The sketch which Peter Vigus had drawn of little Sybil was suspended there in its stead, framed and glazed.

The parson had tried to improve on his first effort, and had made

several larger drawings in coloured chalks, but none had succeeded like the original draught in pencil. By a hazard that exactness of expression had been caught which cannot be recopied unless the draughtsman be an artist, which Mr. Vigus was not. Dr. Tabor seemed to see his sister-in-law gazing steadfastly at him out of those large dark eyes, which were so like his little daughter's.

Mr. Vigus and the Quaker talked so long that it was past ten o'clock when it occurred to them to remark that it was getting late. The rain had settled into a steady downpour. It pattered against the window-panes, it dripped its rivulets from the eaves, and its noise mingled with the sad sougging of the wind.

"A bad night," said the young parson, as he rose to go, "but I have my umbrella. Touzel must borrow one if he wants shelter."

"Before thou goest, friend, thou wilt join us at prayers?" said the Quaker.

"Yes, certainly," answered Peter Vigus, lapsing serious.

At this moment the garden-gate was heard to creak, some steps trod on the wet gravel, and the door-bell was rung.

"Who can that be at this hour?" wondered Violet, gathering up her work. "I hope it is not a surgery case."

"I should be very sorry to be called out on such a night," said Dr. Tabor, though he roused himself.

"Oh, but you must not go; you must tell them you are tired, dear," exclaimed Violet, with the dislike of all doctor's wives to night cases; whereat her father gently rebuked her, observing that a man cannot choose his own hours for needing to have a broken limb set.

But this was no surgery case. The housemaid came in with a card which she handed to the Quaker, who put on his spectacles and read the name on it aloud.

"It is Michael Christy, chaplain of Tolminster Gaol!" said he, in surprise.

"Mr. Christy was employing Riddel when the accident occurred," remarked Dr. Tabor. "I suppose he has come about that."

"Show in Mr. Christy," said Violet to the housemaid.

Michael had taken off his overcoat in the hall, but he had no umbrella, and was sorely soaked and splashed. His pallor, his evident fatigue, and limping gait struck all as he entered the drawing-room. The sight of so many people abashed him, and the sudden passage from dusk to light confused his vision. The Quaker observed how sorrowful he looked, and advanced to greet him.

"Friend, we are glad to see thee. Didst thou wish to speak to me alone?"

"What I have to say concerns Mrs. Hawthorne too, in fact all your family, Mr. Hawthorne," answered Michael, with an effort.

"This is my wife, this my daughter Violet and her husband," remarked the Quaker, "and this is our friend Peter Vigus. Nay, friend Vigus, thou needst not go. Thou art as one of the family." This he said because the parson had made a move to leave the room.

"It is getting late ; I think I will bid you good night," said Mr. Vigus ; but Michael, who perceived that he was a clergyman, made a sign that his withdrawal was not necessary.

"Excuse my visiting you at such an hour," he added, still standing, "but my business would not admit of delay. You have a second daughter, Mr. Hawthorne?"

"Yes, friend ; hast thou read an advertisement about her?"

"No, I was not aware that you had advertised, but I have come to bring you news of your child."

The old people started and stared. The knitting glided out of Mrs. Hawthorne's hands. Mr. Hawthorne turned red and coughed.

"Friend," said he, a little huskily, "if thou hast news of our daughter Sybil sit down and let us hear."

"One word," exclaimed Mrs. Hawthorne, half rising. "Is our child alive?"

"Yes, she is," replied Michael.

"And in England?" added Violet, eagerly.

"She is in England."

"Sit down, please, Mr. Christy, near the fire," said Violet, motioning him to a chair, and she herself subsided near her mother.

So Michael sat down, and to the father, mother, and sister, who listened with faces which may be imagined but not described, he told the story of Margaret Field.

* * * * *

The recital was finished ; every pitiful detail of it had been communicated without reserve.

Mrs. Hawthorne and Violet were both crying. More than once Michael had been stopped in his narrative by their uncontrollable weeping. The Quaker was wiping his spectacles, and nodded gratefully to Peter Vigus, who murmured his sympathy.

"Friend, thou hast not told us whether our daughter Sybil hath a child," said the Quaker to Michael, after there had been a long pause.

"No, she is childless," answered Michael.

"That accounteth for her having been afraid of her father and mother," remarked the old man, dolefully. "Such mistrust could never have entered the heart of one who was herself a mother."

"Poor child! What troubles!" was all Mrs. Hawthorne could say.

Dr. Tabor looked very stern. He had left his seat and stood behind his wife's chair, stroking his red beard.

While Violet and her parents were touched by the sentimental aspects of the story, he considered its practical side. He saw into what a net his sister-in-law had got involved. She must be found and brought home, but after that her friends would still have to extricate her from the criminal proceedings resulting from the assault on Miss Graham.

"It is an infamous plot," he muttered, indignantly.

"Only to think of Colonel Forester acting like that!" ejaculated Violet. "A man so polite and gentle, who never gave us occasion to suspect him!"

"No punishment will be too severe for him," declared Dr. Tabor.

"We desire no vengeance," said Mrs. Hawthorne, tearfully; "let our child be restored us. We will watch over her and try to make her forget the past."

"Why has not Sybil come here already?" asked Violet. "She has perhaps fallen ill after all these torments. Have you any idea where she can have gone, Mr. Christy?"

"No, but I will find her," replied Michael, earnestly. "If I have to leave all other work I will find her. I only ask you" (here his voice failed him a moment), "I only ask that you will consider the plea I have advanced for my brother. It is a bitter grief to me that he has been mixed up in the persecution of your daughter. To-morrow I shall have to bear witness at the inquest; if you can sanction my remaining silent as to the facts that would bring my brother to disgrace I humbly beg you to do so. I pledge myself that I will leave no stone unturned to requite this favour by seeing that Margaret, Mrs. Forester, I mean, has full justice done her."

It was easy to see how sincere his grief was. Dr. Tabor, who was not emotional, pitied him and admired his honesty.

As for the Quaker, he would not let his visitor remain in doubt for one moment that he had earned the pardon he implored.

"Friend, we shall do thy brother no harm," he said, with quiet dignity. "The Lord will send thee comfort in him, by making him a new creature. Meanwhile, thou must tarry in our house this night, for it is too late for thee to go away. We were about to say family prayers when thou camest; wilt thou say them for us, and so feel that there is peace in our midst, and good-will to thee and thine?"

The old man advanced and laid a hand paternally on the chaplain's shoulder, but Michael was overcome and could not speak.

Mrs. Hawthorne and Violet exchanged a glance through their tears. From Michael's present emotion, not less than from the strong feeling he had unconsciously shown during parts of his recital, when dwelling on Margaret's trials, they had both drawn one conclusion. The penetration of women is seldom at fault in such cases. The mother and sister divined that Michael Christy loved Sybil, whom he called Margaret.

CHAPTER LII.

MR. GRAHAM.

AND what of Philip Forester during this night of troubles? What of Rose and her father?

In forming the resolution to make full avowals to Mr. Graham, Philip had forgotten that he should not get the opportunity of doing so until very late that night. As Fairdale Hall was full of visitors, there was a large dinner-party every evening; and on this particular day some extra visitors had been invited. It was urgent that Philip should have a private interview of some hours with Mr. Graham, and obviously this would not be feasible until the last of the guests had retired.

On arriving at Tolminster Philip walked to the "Crown" and put on his evening clothes, then drove in a fly to the barracks to see Frank. He learned that the dragoon had gone to dine at Fairdale along with several of his brother officers. This reassured him, for he argued somewhat hastily that Frank would not have gone out to dinner if he had been in much distress of mind. As a fact, Frank had accepted Mr. Graham's invitation because he thought it best to keep up appearances until his ruin actually burst upon him.

The flyman turned his horse's head, and an hour later Philip was at Fairdale.

Everybody there, except Rose, knew that he had been summoned to London in consequence of the murder of an old servant of his, but nobody saw anything more in the matter than appeared on the surface. It was a shocking thing, a distressing thing: it furnished the gentlemen with conversation over their wine, but they scrupled

to talk of it in the drawing-room because of Rose. Nelly had questioned Frank, but he professed to know nothing more about the affair than had been printed in the papers.

To drown his nervousness Frank drank largely at dinner. He could stand a great deal of liquor, but he took rather more than he could carry with composure, and on joining the ladies he was flushed and garrulous. Nelly, who had never seen him in this state, was rather amused than alarmed. He talked with her in a wild way, for the mere sake of talking; but hearing Philip announced, he abruptly left her and walked across the room to meet his friend. Philip entered with a collected air. His face concealed his emotions like an iron mask. A general murmur of welcome saluted him.

"My dear boy, you must be half famished," said Mr. Graham, taking his hand; then, sinking his tone: "Rose thinks you went to London about law business, you had better not undeceive her. We will talk about that affair alone by-and-by."

"Very well," answered Philip, growing a shade paler, for he thought this phrase signified that Mr. Graham had already learned something.

"Anything new?" whispered Frank, in a thick voice.

"Nothing new," was the tranquil reply; and brushing past him, Philip made for the chair where Rose was seated.

She had heard his voice, and a blush of joy suffused her cheeks as he approached.

"My darling," he said, stooping to kiss her.

"I thought you had got lost in a London fog," she murmured, with tender reproach. "Sit down here close to me, and tell me all you have been doing. How provoking those lawyers are!"

"They have not done with me yet, I am afraid," Philip rejoined, thinking of the morrow.

"Shall you be obliged to go away again? Oh, they seem bent on teasing us! But dinner is over, and you must be hungry. Shall I order something for you?"

"I will only take a cup of tea, dear, thank you."

"Let me fetch it for you," she said, and rising she glided to the table as easily as if she could see.

Several gentlemen, who were standing around, hastened to assist her in getting what she wanted, and she returned, holding the cup. "See how well I can manage, with others to help me," she remarked, smiling.

The drawing-room was crowded. Several officers of the 12th Dragoons had been invited. The Armstrongs were there, and Mr. Graham's Lancashire relatives, and amongst others there figured

a very jolly, portly person, who was Lord St. Hubert, Philip's cousin. His lordship came up to shake hands, and all the other guests advanced one by one, or in groups, to give a greeting and say something civil. Philip found no time to think. In the brief moment that elapsed, while Rose was getting his tea, he had to make a dozen bows, and to repeat as many times conventional words of politeness.

When Rose returned everybody withdrew, except Lord St. Hubert, who had no notion that he was *de trop*. Nor was he so far as Rose was concerned, for his conversation was agreeable, and he professed a great admiration for Philip. He began talking about the latter's coming marriage and honeymoon tour.

His lordship was a rosy peer of about forty, who was corroded by the secret chagrin of weighing twenty stone, which interfered painfully with his comfort in the hunting-field and with his horse's. Lady St. Hubert was a sentimental and sylph-like creature, ten years younger than her husband, with dark hair and eyes, diaphanous hands, and a strong propensity to rhapsodize in a flutey voice about heroes and pining love. She professed to think the world dolefully prosy, and Lord St. Hubert the prosiest man on it, though she might have searched far and vainly for a consort more tender and manageable. When philosophers, who scan the future, argue that a good husband makes a good wife, a good wife a good family, and that by the multiplication of good families the social system may be at length purified, one such wife as Lady St. Hubert is enough to upset all their theories, for she possessed everything that ought to have made a woman thankful, yet gratitude was not in her.

Lady St. Hubert liked Philip Forester, and was delighted with his romantic betrothal to a blind girl. Seeing her husband in colloquy with the lovers, she glided to Rose's side and took the seat which Philip vacated for her. She was dressed in a rich black dress with a flowing train, and had gloves which reached almost to her elbows.

"What is my husband talking to you about?" she said, languidly fanning herself. "Something about horses, I am sure."

"Lord St. Hubert was saying that a quiet mare might be broken in for me so that I might ride with Philip," answered Rose.

"I knew it must be something about horses," said her ladyship.

"I offered to break in the mare myself, my dear, and Philip could hold her with a leading-rein," remarked the good-natured peer.

"I should like it so much. It used to be one of my chief pleasures

to ride," said Rose; "and Lord St. Hubert has made another kind suggestion. He proposes that we should all go up the Rhine together next spring. Though I cannot see I should enjoy the scenery as much as if I could, for he and Philip would describe me the ruined castles we passed, and my imagination would perhaps paint them to me as lovelier than you would see them with your eyes."

"That is a sweetly poetic thought, my dear child," rejoined Lady St. Hubert, caressingly, "but I am afraid that my husband would talk to you more about the hotels where the cookery was good than about ruined castles."

"Why, my dear, it seems to me that when you and I went up the Rhine together I entered sufficiently into the romance of the thing."

"Did you? So far as I can recollect your conversation rolled chiefly on *table-d'hôte* dinners."

"That is at least a subject of daily interest," laughed Rose.

"Oh, but you must take care when you are married that Philip devotes his thoughts to something better than eating and hunting. There must be a little grandeur in life," sighed Lady St. Hubert.

"That's it; my wife is always urging that she and I should go and get killed in defence of something grand, but she only means half of what she says," ejaculated Philip's cousin, bantering.

"I mean all I say," replied her ladyship, with asperity. "Lord St. Hubert fills our rooms at Foxmoor with foxes' brushes, and he will be quite content that his children should retain no worthier trophies of his exploits as an Englishman."

"But, my dear, it seems to me that the Foresters have done their duty pretty well in history."

"Possibly; but what credit may attach to them in the present generation will come from Philip, and not from you."

The worthy peer beat a retreat, for he could not parry his wife's spiteful thrusts. He fell back upon Sir Wemyss Christy, but only came in for more reproofs. The baronet, looking upon his abnormal corpulency as a sign of disease that required doctoring, thought the occasion good for administering to him a lecture upon hygiene.

"I think of founding a hospital for the fat," he said. "Obesity requires intelligent and regular treatment."

"Regular treatment! Then you say that nothing but rusks and ill-cooked meat will reduce me to riding weight?"

"I put it to you. If a man goes on increasing at the rate of a stone in six months, how long can that last?" asked the dismayed baronet.

"I think I would rather be stout and happy, though, than lean and wretched."

"But why should you be wretched?"

"No man was ever happy who breakfasted off rusks. After all, I am not ambitious; I should be satisfied if I could melt myself to such a weight as your handsome nephew the dragoon yonder."

Frank had gone back to Nelly's side, and to atone for having unceremoniously left her was paying a compliment to her white silk dress looped up with scarlet roses.

"There is St. Hubert wishing he were like me," he said, taking off his remarks.

"There is no disputing about tastes," replied Nelly. "But you are only saying this to change the subject of our conversation. You have not yet told me why you ran off so excitedly when Colonel Forester entered."

"I wanted to speak to him."

"About that horrible murder? You look more troubled about it than he does. Why is he so cold and hard-featured to-night?"

"He can't sit down before all these people and cry."

"If my maid were killed I should not mind how many people were in the drawing-room to see me cry. *B-r-r-r*, the idea makes me shudder. Frank, you are concealing something from me. You have not been yourself all the evening, and you are strangely reluctant to discuss this matter with me."

"You have no special taste for horrors, Nelly."

"We read horrors of battle every day, and you never fail to tell me how many Frenchmen are killed," retorted Nelly, fastening her large eyes on him. "If there is some secret here, you ought to tell me, Frank; you promised me the other day, you know."

"To tell you my own secrets, not my friends'," replied Frank.

"Don't question me, Nell. You shall know all some day, and you may find it more than you would have wished to know. I am so down-hearted to-night that I could dash my head against a stone wall. We may not see each other again for some time. Perhaps they will separate us. I only ask you not to believe all the abuse you may hear about me. If we can ever get married after all you will see that I am not so bad as they pretend."

"Oh, Frank, what are you saying?" exclaimed Nelly, turning deadly pale and chilly. "What has happened? Don't leave me. I guessed there was something, and you will make me distracted if you tell me no more than this." Her little hand pressed his wrist, and she almost forced him to sit down beside her. But he would add nothing to his lamentable outburst. He was dogged and morose,

and sought to quiet her with vague words which brought no quietness at all. There were too many people passing to and fro for her to insist, and she was obliged to restrain her tears. Soon Mr. Graham accosted her, asking if she would kindly play an accompaniment on the piano to a young gentleman who sang Scotch ballads.

She could not conveniently make an excuse, but the look which she threw at Frank as Mr. Graham led her away cut him to the soul.

The room was hushed, and Mr. Graham stood by Nelly to turn over the leaves of her music-book while she was playing. His amiable features were as placid as usual, and Philip, who, from his place near Rose, watched him intently, saw nothing now to justify the momentary alarm he had experienced. Yet he reflected that before morning the expression of affectionate confidence which beamed in his intended father-in-law's face whenever their eyes met would have died away thence for ever. He was about to deal a blow which would strike down that gentle yet lofty nature, and he asked himself how he should summon up courage to deal it.

Suddenly a footman came into the room with a card on a silver salver, and stood near the door waiting so as not to disturb the singing. As soon as the ballad was ended he approached his master and spoke a few words in a low tone. Mr. Graham glanced at the card with a shade of astonishment, murmuring an apology to Nelly, whom he had reconducted to her seat, and walked out of the room.

He had not glanced towards Philip, but the latter and Frank, who saw him retire, were both animated by the same presentiment. They exchanged a look, and by a common impulse moved from their places and made for one of the window embrasures, where they met.

"Are you aware that my brother suspects you of having murdered Margaret?" began Frank, point blank.

"Margaret escaped from me to-day," rejoined Philip, thinking it useless to dissemble. "I did not tell you the truth the other day, so as not to excite you unnecessarily."

"You see what your finessing has led to," responded Frank, bitterly. "Michael means to give you into custody."

"He dare not," said Philip, whose hands trembled nevertheless.

"He will dare anything. Regard for me won't stop him. If you can't produce Margaret you had better make a run under cover."

"I shall not run," said Philip.

"No more shall I," rejoined Frank.

"If things should come to their worst, though, I should like to feel that you are safe, Frank," proceeded Philip, hurriedly. "Look here, I'll come and see you to-morrow morning. I have money."

"Pah! what's the use of telling me that now. Do you think life

would be worth keeping if I had to bolt and lurk in some hole like a badger? Pull me out of this mess, or I'll shoot myself out of it."

"How do you mean?"

"I have a revolver in my pocket," said Frank, with a steadfast gaze into his friend's eyes.

They had not been speaking five minutes, but already Mr. Graham was back. He opened the door with a startled air, and his features were blanched. Looking round the room, he sought Forester, and beckoned to him to come out.

Forester obeyed the sign. As soon as he was in the hall Mr. Graham took him by the arm with a quaking gesture of paternal sympathy.

"My boy, what does this mean? They have arrested your servant Jasper for that murder in London! The inspector from Tolminster has driven over to tell me so. Come into this room and hear him."

Forester had not the least idea that Jasper was suspected, for when he had seen the London police in the morning Thomas Buckster had not yet laid his information. He imagined that the inspector had come with a warrant to arrest him too, but his stare as he confronted the man was not the less haughty on that account. The inspector, however, saluted him respectfully and merely stated that he had received a telegram from Scotland Yard, ordering him to apprise Colonel Forester that his servant had been apprehended and identified as the presumed murderer.

"Identified?" echoed Philip, incredulously.

"Yes, sir, here is the telegram," and the inspector handed a pink slip, on which Forester read confusedly: "*Jasper given into custody by Rev. Michael Christy. Identified by housemaid,*" &c.

"What had Mr. Christy to do with it?" inquired Mr. Graham, who scanned the paper, standing at Philip's elbow.

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir."

"What was Jasper doing in London? When did you see him last, Philip?"

"To-day."

"But this charge is a preposterous mistake, is it not?"

"I hope so," answered Philip.

He made a sign that he should like the inspector to withdraw. Seized with an unspeakable astonishment, Mr. Graham ushered out the official, telling him to go and get some refreshment below before he returned to Tolminster. Then he closed the door and approached Philip, who was resting an elbow on the mantelshelf in an attitude

of utter prostration, more apparent than real, though, for the man was mustering all his force of nerve at this moment when he seemed nerveless.

The room in which they were was a small boudoir furnished with Japanese hangings. Quaint figures were embroidered on the white silk tapestry of the wall, and a soft pinkish light was shed through a square lantern of coloured glass that hung from the ceiling. The clock over the fireplace marked half-past ten.

"I have a good deal to tell you," said Philip, rousing himself. "Can you spare me an hour?"

"I can spare you any time. Don't keep me in suspense, my boy, for I see there is some calamity amongst us," implored Mr. Graham, anxiously.

"I shall need all your forbearance," moaned Philip.

"I have always treated you like a son, treat me as a father," said Mr. Graham, touching his shoulder.

"I will; and may you hear me as a father to the end, for I must appeal chiefly to your heart."

In this way Philip Forester began his confession.

At about the same hour Michael Christy was relating the same tale of woe at Ivy House; but how differently the two men dealt with their subject! In Philip's narrative facts were so grouped as to make him seem the victim of an inexplicable fatality. He had erred, but from right motives; he had practised deceit, but only that good might come of it. The excuse of all he had done was love. His conscience did not upbraid him, and if it had not been for the ill-luck that had pursued him he should never have been under the humiliating necessity of suing for help and pardon.

In sum he tried to prove that he was not married to Margaret Hawthorne, and that, if somehow a scandal could be avoided, no obstacle would stand in the way of his marrying Rose. He made light of the charge against Jasper, believing that it would not be difficult to set up an alibi.

Unfortunately for him, Mr. Graham was a man of exquisitely-tempered honour, who abhorred deceit in all its forms. Of the differences between a white lie and a black one he was no judge, for he did not tell falsehoods himself, and had never exercised his casuistry in devising under what circumstances a systematic perversion of truth might be justifiable in others. All he saw was that the man whom he had chosen as a husband for his only child had failed to requite the confidence reposed in him, and had, in fact, earned his boundless esteem under false pretences. Apart from the atrocity of the drama in which Philip had got involved, this was

horrible. Mr. Graham recalled the numberless deliberate falsehoods that Philip must have told him, his hypocrisy and affectations of filial trustfulness, and sickened. Then he thought of Rose, who loved this man so devotedly, that if separated from him she would be like a bud torn from the parent branch and droop to death. He had time to ponder, for Philip spoke for nearly an hour, and he returned no answer. Long before Rose's lover had finished his defence Mr. Graham's mind had wandered from the points at issue, and was altogether centred on his child. He appeared to be aging perceptibly. His thin, pensive face, pinched by the agony of his thoughts, became like a very old man's; his abundant grey hair, which had been growing whiter and whiter for months, looked quite hoary now. He sat in a crouching attitude, his left hand supporting his right elbow, and his cheek resting on the palm of his right hand. A man sits like that when the light of the soul has faded from him, and all seems darkness around.

Philip had grown haggard too; but the time came when he had to ask Rose's father for a direct reply. Mr. Graham looked at him with a melancholy effort to rally his scattered thoughts, and was like to have sobbed.

"If Rose heard of this it would kill her," was all he could say.

"But why should she hear of it?" exclaimed Philip, in a hoarse voice. "You do not doubt my love for her?"

"I believe that you love her; how could any one help loving her?" murmured the grief-stricken father. "You must give me a night to reflect over this. I thought till just now that I could die content leaving my child to your care. Oh, my poor Rose, what would become of her were I to die now? It is for your sin that she was blinded after all!"

"She loves me as much as I do her," pleaded Philip. "Let me go and wish her good night that she may not suspect any evil."

"No," exclaimed Mr. Graham, standing up and putting out an arm as if to bar the way. "I will see you to-morrow; I shall have made up my mind by that time as to how I ought to act."

The tone in which he said this was so peremptory that Philip could only submit. It was getting late, and several of Mr. Graham's guests were departing. He left the room without adding a word, and Philip followed after a few minutes.

In the hall servants brought Philip his hat and overcoat, but instead of going out through the front entrance, where he must have encountered visitors, Rose Graham's lover retreated through a back door which led to the stables. Unseen by any one, he jumped into the fly that was waiting for him. and was driven back to the

"Crown." His brow was dark ; his breast was rent between rage and despair. Since he was not allowed to see Rose he felt as if his sun had withdrawn its light.

CHAPTER LIII.

TOLMINSTER CATHEDRAL.

THAT night Mr. Graham's tradesmen had been holding a meeting at the "Crown," in order to decide what present they should offer to Miss Graham on the occasion of her wedding. Their deliberations had been assisted by a considerable consumption of brandy and water, so that they ended by forming the unanimous resolution (melodiously expressed) "not to go home till morning." Those provincial shopkeepers are terrible fellows at junketing when their wives are not there to see. However, upon Philip's return the landlord bundled them out, not wishing to have the slumbers of his distinguished visitor and customer disturbed. From his window on the second floor, which he opened to let in a little of the cool night air, Philip saw festive groups straggle across the market-place, loth to take leave of one another ; others lingered smoking under the gas-lamp flaring beneath the red cushion and the big gilt crown which constituted the sign of the house.

The "Crown" of Tolminster was one of those good old country hotels which are the comfort of England. It thrived upon quarter-sessions, assizes, elections, and fox-hunters, of whom there were always two or three staying in the place during winter. The farmers' market ordinary was held in its ancient assembly-room. It baited hunters and let flies. The officers of the garrison gave their private dinners there, patronized its billiard-table, which was better than that at the barracks, and sipped a good deal of sherry and bitters while paying their court to the pretty barmaid. You entered the hotel under a brick archway which led to the stable-yard, and where hung, suspended to hooks overhead, in summer, quarters of lamb and ducklings—in winter, game. Passing through the door to the left, an appetizing glass cupboard appeared stocked with cold joints and bundles of rhubarb, or bowls of green peas, according to season. There was not a railway hotel in the kingdom could serve up better sirloins or provide such breakfasts of bacon and new-laid.

eggs. Sam, the grey-whiskered head-waiter, had been a fixture in the coffee-room for thirty years, and was as well known throughout the county as the lord-lieutenant. This Sam took as great a pride in the hotel as if it were his own, and always superintended the closing of its doors at night in person. On this particular night, as he came out under the archway and glanced up at the façade to see if all the windows of the untenanted rooms were shut, he saw Colonel Forester leaning with both elbows on his sill in an attitude of vacant contemplation.

Philip could not sleep. He was reflecting, and though the night air was piercingly cold to others, he did not feel its keenness. It refreshed his brow, which burned.

When the hotel had barred its doors the market-place was soon deserted. Not even a policeman moved about on his solitary beat under the dull red gas-lamps and the blinded windows of sleeping houses. The cathedral spire cast a tall shadow across the place, and its groined porch was dark as the mouth of a cavern where the ghosts of departed ages hover.

Ages—yes; and ages had the old minster frowned there, and to many another gazer besides this one had its porch seemed dark by night and by day. From the mediæval monks who had built it, to the regicide Puritans who had desecrated it, and from these again to the sorrowing wives and mothers who had erected in it memorial marbles and stained glass windows, bearing the names of heroes slain at Balaclava or Lucknow, right through the long track of centuries walked the procession of suppliants and mourners who had sighed under its vault. Mailed knights had passed there to shrive themselves on the eve of battle; pale friars, who had forsaken the world from luckless love, had worn their knees upon its stones; fearful penitents, bare-footed, with halters round their necks and tapers in their trembling hands, had been led thence to the stake; and women had fled there with their little ones at their breasts to seek sanctuary in the appalling hours of persecution. The record of human wickedness and folly was written on its walls in many a mark which modern lookers thought was the work of time, and its rafters had been shaken by many a sob and cry, the echoes of which had long died away from earth to be reverberated above, where such sounds are eternally remembered. But from the first man or woman who had poured out a heart's grief beneath its stony arches to the last, amongst all that host of suppliants whose heads had been bowed there by cruelty of men, or by the worse yoke of their own upbraiding consciences, there was not one who had ever gazed with so despairing an eye as Philip Forester at this porch, of which Rose

Graham, who was to be married in the cathedral, was, maybe, then dreaming as of an entrance to paradise. For thus do we all build cathedrals in our hearts, each according to the light that is in us; and if to some the outlines of the building seem tenebrous, to others it is given to see only splendour and joy in those temples not made with hands. From out of all the glad voices of the past, and not from the gloomy, came the whispers that lulled the gentle, blind girl in her sleep—voices of other brides long gone but still robed in white, voices of children who sang anthems, voices of exulting mothers who held their babes over the font, voices even of radiant martyrs who had met death with hymns on their lips—for not the least glorious among the many jubilant sounds which had swelled through the majestic aisles were those of the young and old who had suffered for their faith, and who, as they approached their calvary, looked serenely beyond it, through this dark porch, to the everlasting day that awaited them. To the pure every church is a door to heaven.

But neither bridal dresses nor wedding posies were the sights Philip Forester beheld in his midnight contemplations, neither organ music nor the voices of choristers were the sounds that fell upon his ears. Indeed he had a prescience now that his marriage would not take place. His confession had not been received as he had expected. The ambitious schemes for which he had plotted, the hopes that had sprung out of his love, were all laid low. And yet he still did hope a little, for his love was so deep.

If Mr. Graham would forgive, and if Rose were given to him, what would prevent them both, even if things came to the worst, from flying abroad together and living in some quiet seclusion, where, ignorant of what had happened to him, Rose might retain her faith in him entire, when every other human being had lost it? As a man in a shipwreck, after hoping first that he may be rescued by a boat, then clings to a buoy, then to a mere spar, finally sees that his only chance of succour rests on a swimmer's hand, so Philip, discarding all his visions of worldly advancement one by one, now looked to Rose's hand alone, and fancied he could be happy if it held nothing, not a penny, only the power to clasp him and draw him out of his sea of troubles.

Suddenly, as he stared into the night, with a flashing eye whose light had been renovated by the rekindled spirit within him, it seemed to the watcher that day had come. The rose-window over the cathedral porch was tinted with the pink reflection of dawn, and there was a hum in the air as of a population awaking and opening its doors. Glancing upwards, however, Philip perceived that the

sky was still dark, the stars shone softly, there was not a grey streak to herald morning, and yet the rays on the rose-window were becoming intensified, so that it now glittered like a giant ruby. At the same time the hum of human voices broke into clamours of alarm, and a cry of "Fire" was raised. "Fire! Fire!" the sinister sound was started in several directions at once, and its echoes prolonged through the labyrinths of empty streets.

It mattered little to Philip Forester that a house in Tolminster should burn. Probably some one among the tradesmen who had caroused at the "Crown" had been imprudent with his tallow candle before stowing himself between sheets, and the roasting of his grocery shop was going to be the penalty. The glow of the lighted edifice was spreading itself about with ruddy tints, like those of the lycopodium lamps in stage transformation scenes. Men in shirt-sleeves raced to and fro bawling; a squad of policemen debouched on the market-place at a double; then came a fire-escape, its ladder horizontal, and propelled by fifty persons, making it look like a mammoth centipede on the move; after which, noisily rattling over the paving-stones, arrived a water-engine, drawn not by horses but by men.

The change from the silence of night to the riot of a crowd was so rapid as to resemble the instantaneous conjuring up of a mob from underground. Already a hundred windows, flashing from the general illumination, were opened, and affrighted heads peeped out. The "boots" of the "Crown" had emerged drowsily on to the pavement, and a group of sojourners in the house, hastily clothed, stood around him shading their eyes and looking to some forked tongues of fire which were beginning to coil themselves above the roofs like a nestful of glistening snakes. For a moment or two smoke rose with them straight as the columns of water from a strong fountain, but, caught in mid-air and hurled back by the wind, the sooty clouds soon set in a gushing continuous drift, mingled with sparks, towards the leads of the cathedral. Hereon a voice ascended from beneath Philip's window: "The wind is south-west, and if they don't put out the fire pretty quick the minster will burn."

Till then Philip had been eyeing the scene with no more interest than an unexpected but common-place drama awakens. Hearing, however, that the cathedral was in danger, he started from the window with an air like inspiration on his face. What if this fire could afford him an opportunity of distinguishing himself in such wise as to retrieve the good opinion of Rose's father and of others who were eyeing him askance? Should he save a life, or bravely imperil himself in trying to do so, Mr. Graham might accept this as an atone-

ment; and, if he should be killed, what nobler fate would he wish for than to die with the lustre of an heroic enterprise to keep his memory fresh in the minds of men, hallowed in that of his virgin bride? Philip was too brave to have hesitated a moment in risking his life, even when there was nothing to gain by it. Five minutes after perceiving the chance of redemption which fate had cast in his way he was hurrying across the market-place, resolved that if there were a great deed to be performed in this calamity he should be the man to do it and no other.

All the spectators from the "Crown" followed him, as a pack of mongrels scamper behind a sleuth-hound. When they saw Philip run they stuck close to him, and upon reaching that outer circle of all crowds, which is composed of cautious persons who use their eyes chiefly to set their heels in motion upon sudden emergencies, Philip was the only man who elbowed his way through into the inner precinct where the hard work was going on.

The first person whom he saw was the inspector of police helping to keep the inquisitive in a line out of harm's way, *i. e.* out of other people's harm. He touched his hat to Colonel Forester and made a way for him. Escorted by this official, Philip walked onward, for the furthestmost outskirts of the crowd were at least a hundred yards from the scene of the conflagration, and it was only the hardy and helpful who had ventured near to the burning house, amid the heat, smoke, and the showers of blazing cinders. Already the fire-engine was at work pouring immense volumes of water on to every point where flames appeared, but the efforts of the worthy brazen-helmeted fellows who plied the hose were sorely hampered by distracted neighbours, who implored them to aim now this way and now another, according as the flames seemed to be leaping in the direction of their own dwellings. Men, women, and children, with but little on them beside their bed-clothes, had tumbled out of their houses, and were encumbering the roadway with articles of property which they were intent to save. It was useless to tell persons whose habitations were in no danger at all that they were only increasing confusion by piling up fenders, saucepans, mattresses, and sewing-machines in every spot where they were likely to break other people's shins. The selfishness of men is greater as regards their property than as concerns their lives or their wives'. More than one snug trader was taking care of his cash-box, under the persuasion that his wife could well take care of herself.

The inspector began by bestowing his over-coat upon a lady clad in a table-cloth, then set practically to work helping the firemen; while Philip inquired right and left whether anybody had been

abandoned in the burning house. Nobody could tell him for certain. The owner, a hosier, had been transferred with his family and portable belongings to a public-house down the street, and was whimpering there at having his stock of goods destroyed and his calves scorched; though all his relatives were safe, including a mother-in-law. He was in too dolorous a mood to count anything but the burns on his legs, and knew not whether the number of his rescued maid-servants was correct. It was only after a deal of chattering from a dozen female neighbours, all cackling like poultry, that one of them alluded to an old woman who lodged in a top back room of the hosier's house, and had not been seen among the saved. Almost as soon as this rumour began to circulate, some lamentable cries were heard issuing from the doomed house, though the person who uttered them could not be seen.

It needs only such a summons to bring twenty volunteer rescuers to the front, but amongst all those who darted forward Philip Forester was the foremost. Little he recked for smothering smoke or crackling wood-work, and his dash up the staircase was so bold that half-a-dozen men followed him to the first landing before they were aware of what they were braving. But they recoiled when they saw him disappear up the second flight in a whirl of smoke so thick that a man could not see his own hand in it. One more venture—some than the rest struggled on for a minute, but turned giddy and fell back, thinking the staircase had given way beneath him. As for Philip, guided by the old woman's frantic cries, he continued to ascend so long as there were steps to climb, then bounding through a door, he caught up an inanimate figure that had dropped before him like a bolster, and made his way back pursued by flames, which the draught of the open door had let loose like a pack of hell-dogs, and which belched after him aloud. How he bore his burden unscathed through this deadly blast, how he missed his footing and rolled down twenty steps in the smoke, then picked himself up again and dropped once more in sight of the street door, where he would have lain till suffocated, had not twenty hands drawn him and the woman into the air together, while thrice as many tongues loudly extolled his bravery—all these things were related in the newspapers a few days later. He himself would not have related his adventure, nor have explained how he had found the force to carry himself through an exploit almost beyond man's strength. When he came to himself he had no more hair on his head, face, or eyebrows, and his clothes shredded off him in carbonized ashes, so that he would have been stark-naked if somebody had not given him a blanket. The woman whom he had saved was in a better plight

than himself ; but, on the other hand, during the half-hour of his unconsciousness the fire had made such progress, and the wind continued to blow with such untoward vehemence, that the cathedral stood in imminent peril. All eyes were turned to it. Issuing from the public-house to which he had been removed, Philip perceived the helmets of a dozen firemen moving about on the minster roof like luminous specks, while the hissing noise of their nozzles was audible as they shot spouts of water on to every spot where a cinder fell.

Smarting as he was from his burns, giddy and unsteady on his legs, Philip had recovered his senses, and bethought him that he had not done enough. It was a mercy that nobody showed him a looking-glass, for he must have judged that his disfigurement amply attested the fierceness of the trial he had encountered. But he was excited by the cries of the surging multitude, who had by this time become increased by tributary torrents from all parts of the town, and who so blocked up all the approaches to the cathedral that some private fire-engines arriving at a gallop from the country halls could with difficulty plough their way through the human surf.

There were now no less than eight engines, two large ones worked by steam, the rest small hand-machines, all pumping, fizzing, and spluttering together. Their hose-pipes, uncoiled and stretching from the street to the minster roof, stood up on end like prodigious snakes ; but some of these pipes being out of repair, the water escaped from fissures in them and squirted over those who were plying the pumps, drenching them to the skin. In this desperate fight between Nature's two most destructive elements, the only fear of those who were straining every nerve to bombard the fire demon was that their ammunition would fail, in other words, that the water supply would run short. The street pipes were not enough to feed the eight machines. Some of the smaller ones shifted for their water as they could, getting it from scores of buckets passed from hand to hand among the crowd, from sitz-baths, pitchers, cauldrons, and milk-pails filled at private tanks, and carried by unsteady hands, who spilled half the contents in their hurry, converting the road into a vast puddle, greatly to the damage of the household furniture stacked there. It was not volunteers who were lacking, for two troops of Dragoons had arrived from the barracks, in fatigue costume, with mounted officers (amongst whom Frank Christy) ; but eager as they were to bear assistance, they could do little more than take a hand at the pumps when devoted civilian toilers fell away exhausted. Lord St. Hubert had arrived in an engine from Fairdale, and it was good to see how he laboured,

soddening his solid flesh by the vigorous might of his muscles, perspiring like a true son of Anak, but never letting go his grasp of the pump-bar, which rose and fell with iron screeches under the rude impulse he gave it. He only ceased when his machine had no more fluid to vomit. Five others in the same plight stood helpless, like an artillery-battery dismounted, and the battle had to be carried on by the two steam-machines, whose pipes were beginning to gurgle ominously as in a death-rattle, owing to the deficient stream. It was growing evident that if the roof of the hosier's house could fall in, the extinction of the flames produced by the mass of crumbling ruins would save the cathedral from ignition; but there was danger lest it should not collapse till some part of the minster had caught fire, in which case the total destruction of the sacred edifice would be a certainty. In their anxiety to make their resources of water serve to the utmost, the men at the pumps distributed their liquid now towards one set of hose, now to another, but without being able to afford half as much as was wanted by the rival parties busy on opposite sides of the street. On the roofs of the houses contiguous to the hosier's, nay, on the ledge of the burning house itself, six firemen and as many dragoons were at work with axes and picks, slashing among the slates, the rafters, and chimneys in utter disregard of the doom that would overtake them if the structure were of a sudden to cave in; but these men had need of ceaseless cataracts to protect them from the scorching blasts which blistered their faces and hands, and made the zinc tiling hot as stove-plates under their dauntless feet. Two hosemen, intrepid as sentinels on a rock, seconded them by levelling their spouts without intermission; and one of these two, who had planted his back against a chimney-stack, was sublime in his defiance of peril; one would have thought him made of bronze if it had not been for the hoarse shout which he launched now and then into the street:—"More water!" More water, more and more of it! that was the cry that sounded from all parts in the lurid glare of the night, amid the stench of soot and charring wood, for as fast as the bubbling current leaped up into the hose that was playing upon the house, and diverted the precious liquid from the other pipes, the firemen upon the cathedral, who had gradually become invisible in the smoke, echoed back the frantic appeals of their comrades: "More water! More water!"

Philip watched all this from the doorstep of the public-house, where two extemporized Samaritans were supporting him to breathe the air. His limbs had been chafed with oil and he had wrapped a wet sheet round his loins; he would have been glad to throw away

the blanket which tortured his seared back and shoulders like a garment of pitch, had not his officious attendants made a point of keeping him wrapped up. They desisted, however, when they saw that he could walk alone, and expressed a wish to do so, for, like other spectators of the conflagration, they were fidgety about the fate of their cathedral, and were glad of an excuse to leave their patient and go to stare closer at the progress of the fire. A man's fame as a hero does not always last a full hour; already the act of courage which Philip had performed was being dwarfed by the proportions of what threatened to be a national calamity. For Tolminster Cathedral was as dear to the poet as to the antiquarian, to the painter as to the priest, and there was not an inhabitant of the town but felt anguish at the prospect of its destruction. Every heart throbbed for it, every eye was dilated in looking for the chances of its safety. The only indifferent man in the place was that hosier who had been the primary cause of all the evil, and who was screaming on a mattress in the publican's parlour because his calves hurt him.

Like a soldier who, wounded in a preliminary skirmish, still burns to take part in the great battle of the day which is to bear historical repute, so Philip Forester saw that his night's work would not be complete if he did not expend the remnant of his strength in joining those who were striving for the cathedral. From the public-house, situate at the street corner, to the minster-front there was a distance of more than a hundred yards, and half the intervening space was densely thronged; but, somehow, Philip contrived to pass through the crowd, the police who marshalled it, the piles of furniture that barricaded the way beyond, the reeking engines and the panting men who worked them, till he reached the postern that led up to the cathedral bell-tower, and thence clambered up the spiral stone staircase.

A well-worn staircase it was, which thousands upon thousands of sight-seers, in times old and modern, must have ascended—and many a pair of lovers too, for there were initials and amorous mottoes scratched on the walls all the way up. The deep embrasures that admitted the light were just wide enough to admit of two sitting in company to take rest from the steep ascent and survey the landscape which extended in a glowing panorama that took in more and more miles of hills and meadow-land, rivers and woods, the higher you climbed, and provided only the weather was fair. On this night the old stairs were alternately pitch dark and ruddy red, according as the smoke or flame of the fire predominated; and Philip twice stumbled from a vivid glare like lightning into total

obscurity. But he was surprised to find how easily he could walk, and how benumbed his pain was by rapid motion. He quite knew what he was about : instinct, rather than the rumours he had heard, showed him the dangers of the situation—the possible outburst of flame from some wooden nook of the building, its sudden sweep like a devastating flood along the whole range of the roof, cutting off the retreat of all who stood there and hurling them to inevitable death. Philip was quite prepared for this consummation ; he neither courted nor feared it.

Steeled as he was, however, his heart tightened when he emerged on to the tower platform and witnessed the infernal splendour of the sight beneath him. In sheaves of orange, blue, and red, the flames soared furiously, while the drift of smoke and flashing sparks, struck athwart by the wind, curled itself into eddies before rolling away in headlong confusion towards the east, where the first silver line of dawn was breaking. From this eminence none of the people in the street could be seen, only those dozen men or so still hewing at the roof, and that tranquil fireman with his back to the chimney-stack, who played quietly on the flames like a gardener on a flower-bed. The apparitions of flame that started from the smoke were like the repeated opening and closing of a furnace door ; the fitful reflections which threw flickers on the helmets and faces of the men showed them frowning, felling, and smashing like devils in a forge. Through the forests of chimneys, stretching away over the town, the hurrying vapours took weird shapes like the fog-mists of a winter twilight ; and there were moments when the fire-clouds, rising up on end like snow-wraiths, appeared as though they were about to plunge downwards with the force of an avalanche. The atmosphere was impregnated with the pungent fumes of water and fire mingled, and amid the din of destruction could be heard the crashing of window-panes as they burst from heat.

Even as Philip looked, though, the end was near, for the redoubled blows of the hatchets had loosened all the props of the roof. One final blow, which a Titan might have dealt, clove the main beam like a rotten branch : and down it went, dragging everything with it,—slates, chimneys, rain-pipes, and accumulating such a pressure of ruins that the façade of the house bulged outwards on its third floor, and splitting asunder cast a shower of bricks far and wide. So sudden was the catastrophe that the men who had brought it about reeled under the shock, and clung on to whatever supports they could for bare life. One of the two firemen with the hose was unable to skip back in time to find secure footing, and, missing his balance, was shot into the street, dashing his head and

helmet to pieces on the pavement. The other, against the stack, was seen for a moment hanging by his wrists on to a cornice of masonry, with nothing beneath his feet save the gulf; but he presently hoisted himself between two chimney-pots like a cat, and walked away to find a better coign of vantage, trailing his hose after him.

The downfall of the house was greeted with a loud cheer by the multitude, who now looked upon the cathedral as saved; but this seemed less sure to those who were groping on the minster leads, unable to discern whether all the smoke that blinded them proceeded from the house, or whether some of it is-ued from the building on which they stood. Borne back by the tornado of dust which had been raised by the collapsing roof, Philip had dropped on his face, and allowed the tempest to sweep over him like a tidal wave; but after a minute of darkness he descried lights slowly moving around him like glow-worms. These were the belt-lanterns of the firemen, who, with their water-nozzles in one hand, were crawling about on their knees hunting the fire-sparks as men chase vermin in a sewer. Whenever they saw a flash they turned their hose-cocks and shot a squirt of water at it: there was a hiss as of a scorpion at his death-gasp, and the marksman crawled on, husbanding his water as a sportsman does his powder. Judging by the direction of the wind, the smoke ought to have become thinner as one advanced from the bell-tower on to the roof of the nave, which was on a level with it, but Philip found it grow denser at every step. He turned to consider the reason of this, but before he could discover it several voices of invisible men close to him exclaimed, "Look! the fire's in the belfry!" He looked, and out of an air-hole in the base of the steeple, which rose to a height of seventy feet above the tower, he perceived a tongue of flame darting as from a monster's mouth and licking the stone.

Onward he ran with other scampering feet, who made in a rush for the tower-stairs. The firemen jostled him as they passed, and he found himself propelled down the steep steps like a bale; but although this sudden stampede resembled a flight, nobody was really decamping for safety's sake. In a minute the small band, intent upon warring with the fire wherever they might find it, were standing inside the belfry, upon a circular gallery of wood that ran just beneath the minster's peal of bells. So narrow was this gallery that you might have thought it a mere ledge on the orifice of a well, for the ropes tended to help the illusion, and the rays of the firemen's lanterns as they flashed downwards showed, a hundred feet below, the flags of the bell-ringers' porch white as frozen water.

Above hung the nine bells suspended to powerful rafters, intercrossed and clamped with mighty bands of rusty iron. First the biggest bell—"big Jack," as the townspeople called it—which used to sound the tocsin in days of civil war, but was now seldom tolled except at the death of princes and dignitaries; above it the eight bells of the peal proper—two on the lowermost row, three smaller ones just above, and three others smaller still right aloft near the steeple shaft. A glamour of purple was thrown on the coppery sides of these silent, wide-mouthed heralds of joy and sorrow by an angry line of fire darting along the wood-work over the summit of the topmost bells, almost out of sight.

Philip was the first to perceive where the mischief lurked, and called attention to it by pointing with his finger. A fireman turned his lantern upon him, and started to see a spectral being well-nigh naked, with a sheet round his waist and all the hair singed off his head. "You'd better go to bed, you; your place aint here," he said, with blunt kindness; but the dialogue was not pushed further, for the man proceeded to give rapid orders about introducing the fire-hose into the belfry, and Philip measured with his eye the distance that separated him from the line of flame which every moment's delay was going to render more difficult to extinguish. A fireman had already hastened to the tower-top to direct one of the hosemen to lower his pipe by a rope to one of the staircase embrasures, where another man would haul it in; and this manœuvre was executed with an astonishing promptitude. Unfortunately, when the hose arrived, one single spurt of water was all it would yield. Either the pumps had stopped working or the water supply had run out; in any case this disastrous mishap seemed to seal the fate of the cathedral, and it spread consternation.

But Philip Forester had already taken a resolution. "The fire can't be very strong yet, or the belfry would be full of smoke," said he, with authority. "I will climb up and extinguish it with this sheet."

The dare-devil proposition, coming from an unknown, naked man, was scouted as impracticable; for what was there to climb by? But one of the firemen, belonging to that class of venturers who act as fast as they think, forthwith seized a bell-rope and swung himself over the abyss like a spider at the end of a thread. If he had seized the rope of the big bell it would have been well, but in his haste he had caught one of the smaller ones; instantly the bell pivoted and began a yelling jangle as of a peevish beast molested. Whereon the fireman, balked by the oscillation, and losing his presence of mind, allowed the rope to slip between his hands and

went down to the bottom of the tower like a plummet. He was not killed or maimed, as a shout of his soon told ; but every atom of skin was rasped off his palms, and his trousers, where the rope had frayed them in his vertiginous descent, were cut through as with razors.

More prudent, and disdaining all remonstrance, Philip grasped the big rope, swayed himself gently, and without so much as stirring the monster "Jack," climbed hand over hand till he reached its summit. Another step and he stood on the cross-beam, where, catching two ropes together, he hoisted himself with the alacrity of an ape on to the second row of bells, thence on to the third, and so on till he gallantly bestrode the highest beam. One slip in this awful ascent must have cost him his life ingloriously, but the cross-work of the rafters gave him a foot-hold ; and, though the smaller bells clanged and jabbered as he caught them by the ears, he was nimble enough to make every projection of wood or iron serve as a ladder-rung. How he should get down when he had finished his enterprise, or if he found himself compelled to renounce it by its impossibility, Philip had not reckoned ; he had set forth to stalk the fire in its lair like a brute of prey, and his only present thought was how to kill it.

One glance at the flames, which were ravenously gnawing at the wood four feet above his head, showed that he had made an accurate guess at the situation. A spark had fallen through one of the tower air-holes, and had ignited a heap of wood shavings left in an embrasure by some careless workmen who had been repairing the belfry. The shavings had communicated the fire to the wooden frame of the bell scaffolding, but luckily only a yard's length of it was yet alight. Springing to his feet on the beam, and steadying himself as he could against the tower wall, Philip stripped himself of his sheet, flung it over the flames, and in half a minute had smothered them. The scales of charred wood flew off under his vigorous rubs like the little thorns of a bush, and the sparks crackled around him like a blaze of fire-works. In the scathing heat his breath came and went in gasps, and his palate was parched with thirst ; but he had not yet ended the work he wished to do, for, twisting his sheet to form a hand-rope, he employed his last burst of nerve and strength to raise himself on to the beam lately burning, and thence made a dash into the embrasure where the wood shavings had lain and were still smouldering. He was guided by the suspicion that there might be some more wood-work alight there, nor was he wrong.

Only this devilish fire in the embrasure would not let itself be put out as easily as the other. For a while it defied the efforts of

the man who had the presumption to cope with it single-handed, so that betwixt this fiercest of Nature's forces and the nude wounded being, its aggressor, there arose a deadly struggle, as between a savage man and a panther in her cavern. The sheet was full of holes, for the flames, short as they were, were yet long as the teeth of a ferocious animal, and bit clean through it. The sparks that flew in all directions were as claws tearing the assailant's flesh, the scorching vapours that were making his tongue swell were just like the sanguinary pantings of a tiger-cat at bay. But not with the sheet alone was the resolute fight waged, for Philip's hands and feet were at work, tearing down all that burned and stamping it under heel; and when the last splinter of ignited wood had been thus rendered harmless—when there was nothing left but the smoke hastening away vanquished through the air-hole, and a few scintillating ashes strewn upon the stone floor—then the combatant, seeing there was nothing more to be done, extinguished these last vestiges by falling upon them with his body, exhausted and fainting from pain.

And there they found him an hour afterwards, bereft of consciousness and apparently dying, if not dead. A tall ladder was required to reach him, and a brave man on the ladder to lift him and carry him down. Morning had then dawned, and sunlight was shining over the streets as they bore the lifeless body to the County Hospital upon a stretcher, through a dense crowd who murmured sympathy and words of admiration. Nobody knew the self-devoted victim's name—not even Frank Christy, who had a full view of the disfigured head pillowed on a fireman's jacket, recognized it for Philip Forester's.

All that people knew was that this was the man who had saved Tolminster Cathedral.

CHAPTER LIV.

FRIENDLESS.

THE accident to Forester—whose identity was discovered after he had been carried to the hospital—had an influence on the inquest held touching the death of Nat Riddel. Forester was the only witness who could have spoken conclusively to Jasper's innocence;

and as Jasper obstinately held his tongue for fear lest he should compromise his master, the wretched fellow was committed on a coroner's warrant for wilful murder. Not knowing what had befallen Forester, he went to prison with a rather bitter feeling that the Colonel had deserted him; "and," thought he, "things must be bad indeed for my master to do that."

Michael, the Tabors, and the Quaker, who had gone up to London for the inquest, were not so disconcerted by the account of the fire as they might have been, for, judging by the slight report of it which reached them through the telegram sent to the coroner, they did not imagine that Forester was in any danger of death.

Besides, their chief preoccupation at present was to seek for Margaret.

It occurred to Michael that possibly Margaret might have taken refuge with Barby Haggitt. He knew that this queer girl had given "15" the address of the coffee-house where she meant to apply for a situation when released, and it struck him that Margaret would be more likely to go to Barby for temporary hospitality than to any other woman. Her former friends, if she had any, might frown upon her; but Barby had known her in prison, and would not put her to shame.

In these conjectures Michael was right.

Barby had given Margaret her address, and it had lain in the prisoner's mind like a piece of lumber for which one sees no use at the time, but which becomes serviceable on an emergency. When Margaret fled from B—— Street she was without a friend in London and without money; so as soon as she had reached a place where she could sit down to rest and reflect on what she should do, she remembered that Barby's term of imprisonment must have expired, and that this rugged girl would doubtless help her.

We know how Margaret had contrived to escape. Taking advantage of being alone in the house, she had asked Betsy Dormer to fetch her a glass of water, and while the simple wench obeyed she had opened the street door and run out. Within less than a couple of minutes Betsy hurried after her, but the minute's start was enough, for it enabled Margaret to turn a corner, and Providence so willed it that Betsy darted round another corner. With rapid steps, and looking often behind her, Margaret fled from street to street, taking now to the right, now to the left, without knowing where she went, till she stopped all breathless and saw that she had evaded pursuit. This was opposite a church whose doors were open, and she walked in to seek repose.

In London two places offer rest to the weary—the parks and some

few churches. There is no park in proximity to Soho ; but this church, with its open doors, seemed to invite the tired runaway to enter and obtain rest for her body and quiet to refresh her soul. Margaret had no devout purpose in seeking sanctuary, but having entered the sacred building to rest, she remained to pray.

A wedding was being solemnized.

In front of the altar rails were grouped a number of people, amongst whom the bride's dress formed a white gazing point. Patches of pink marked where the bridesmaids stood, and the minister in his surplice and hood was a conspicuous figure. In the tall pews some chance on-lookers were scattered about sparsely.

It was an ugly church of the Georgian era, without chancel or stained glass ; and the wedding party were not rich people : apparently some trade-folks of the neighbourhood. But though the pomp of choral service was wanting, there was an organist in the loft, and when the blessing had been spoken he struck up Mendelssohn's glorious wedding march. Loud and tunefully pealed the trumpet notes, waking every rafter of the old building, every pane in the tall, square windows, and shooting long thrills through the empty galleries. The groups broke up, and the bride walked joyously down the nave with her bridegroom. They were both young, and she was a pretty girl, all radiant and blushing.

No woman can look on a wedding unmoved. Wife, widow, or maid, it recalls to her the day which, for better or worse, seals a woman's destiny. It speaks of love which is woman's life, and of hopes which flower for a season in the springtide of youth and never grow again afterwards. If to those who are happy the sight of a bride brings soft emotions, how sad is the sight to one whose own wedded life has been a tale of sorrows !

As Margaret saw the bride pass by so confident in a sunny future, the thought of her own desolate fate as a wife fell upon her with overwhelming misery. There had been a time when her hopes beat as high as this young girl's, but now there was no ray of light in the prospect of her coming days. Only revenge, and then rest—these were the things which she desired, and the wish to be avenged of her tormentors was less than the yearning to be at peace. She bowed her head and prayed that peace at least might not be denied her. This was the first time she had prayed in freedom for months—nay, in captivity she had ceased to pray, feeling that she must be shut out from God's compassion since He allowed her to suffer so much.

The church was emptied, and a verger told Margaret that she must go, as the doors were about to be closed. She rose and went

out. A woman who was passing told her in what quarter of the town she stood, and she knew enough of London to find her way alone to Barby's address: this was the "Black Lamb Coffee House," King Street, Westminster, about three miles from this church.

In London a woman can walk fast or slow, be well or ill dressed, seem merry or sad, without attracting any attention. Margaret was poorly dressed, for the black silk gown she wore had grown shabby in prison, and her velvet bonnet had been knocked about in the asylum. She had left her cloak in Captain Field's house, and had only one glove. Conscious of being oddly attired, she imagined that everybody stared at her, but this was due chiefly to her fear of being recognized by some one in pursuit of her. She several times darted erratically across streets through fancying that she saw Captain Field or his servant coming in the opposite direction. Thus it took her more than an hour to reach King Street, and she was in a woeful flutter when she crossed the sanded threshold of the "Black Lamb."

The first sight of this establishment was not calculated to reassure her. It was a place where recruits came to take their meals during the two or three days' interval between their enlistment and their transfer to the depots. The boxes were crowded with men in fustian mixed with sergeants in uniform, who were eating at greasy deal tables without cloths. At a long counter near the window to the right a fat man in shirt-sleeves and a white apron was carving joints of boiled beef and roast pork alternately: and a couple of strapping girls were hurrying about with platefuls of viands and pewter pots of beer. The air reeked with an odour of crackling and boiled cabbage.

For a moment no one took notice of Margaret, for customers were coming in and going out; but when the fat man in shirt-sleeves saw that she stood still, uncertain whom to address, he asked her without ceasing to carve what she wanted. He was too absorbed to remark whether she was a lady. Besides having to attend to his joints, he had to dispense hot raisin pudding, beef-steak puddings in little basins, steamed potatoes, and Gloucester cheese. Every moment one or other of the waitresses came, saying, "One plum-duff for Number Two;" "Some more spuds for Six;" "Now then, master, look sharp with the beef and carrots for Eight, who's in a hurry."

"The carrots is running out," answered the host. "Who is it you want, young 'ooman? Barbara Haggit? Why she was here not an hour ago."

"Is she in your service?" asked Margaret, approaching the counter.

"No-o ; how came you to know her ?" inquired the host, eyeing Margaret suspiciously, and pausing this time with his carving-knife and fork poised.

"She told me she was going to apply to you for a situation," said Margaret, blushing crimson.

"Told it yer in prison, eh ?" rejoined the man, lowering his voice, and he winked. "I understand ; but Barby ain't here. I hadn't a place vacant for her, and she couldn't afford to wait. She came to-day to fetch some things she had left here, and to say that she'd got a situation. One of those girls will tell yer where she's gone. Hi, Maria !"

"Cheese and celery for Twelve, pork and cabbage for One," said Maria, running forward.

Amid the clatter of plates, knives, and forks, the noise of men eating, drinking, jesting, Margaret could scarcely hear what was said to her. A hussar sergeant of jovial turn who had tiddled his fill held out a quart pot and invited her to finish its contents. Maria advised her to stand further back or she would get her dress stained with gravy. The host had begun slicing again at his roast pork, but he told Maria that "this 'ere young party" had come after Barby's address.

"Barby Haggit has gone as chambermaid to 'Chupps' Hotel,' Soho Square," said Maria. "You won't find her there to-day, though, for she doesn't begin work till to-morrow."

"What is she doing to-day ?" asked Margaret, disappointed.

"Enjoyin' herself," laughed Maria. "She's fallen in again with that sojer-chap of hers who brought her to trouble, and they've made it up again. She told me they was going to the theatre to-night. Perhaps, though, she'll go to Chupps' to sleep. 'Tain't sure."

"Thank you," said Margaret, and she walked out, followed by the curious glance of Maria, who nodded to her master and said, "Wonder whether that's one of Barby's prison pals ?"

"'Spose it is. Sharp, now, with those plates," rejoined the host.

Margaret's heart drooped as she stood on the pavement again, not knowing whither to turn next. She meant to write to her father and mother, but before she could do this she must find a shelter, and after that she must have some place where to lay her head until an answer was sent her. She could not be sure that her parents were alive, and perhaps Violet and her husband were no longer living at Ivy House. For a moment she thought that her lodging that night must be the workhouse.

All at once she remembered that she had some trinkets about her—a gold watch and chain, her wedding-ring, and a keeper. It had not occurred to her that money could be made out of these things, for she had never entered a pawnbroker's in her life. She knew nothing of the conditions on which cash is lent at these places, but during the days when she worked at Miss Mudge's she had often heard her fellow-sempstresses talk of "popping" superfluities when times were hard, and in her destitution she thought she would try the plan. Retracing her steps up Whitehall, she passed into the Strand, and soon beheld three golden balls hanging over a jeweller's shop. Not knowing that there were two entrances, she walked into the shop; but when it was seen that she removed the chain from her neck, she was directed to go through another door, and found herself in a box like the pews in the prison chapel. In front of her was a counter, and behind it a clerk with a pen behind his ear, who took her watch and chain unconcernedly and asked her, "How much?"

In her inexperience Margaret did not understand the meaning of this question, and it had to be repeated. "How much do you want us to lend you on this?"

"Anything you think proper," faltered Margaret.

"You must name a sum, please."

"I do not know how much the things cost; they were given to me."

"What is your name?"

"Mrs. Forester,"—this was said firmly.

"Where do you live?"

"I have no home in London."

"But where are you going to sleep to-night? We are obliged to ask: it's the law."

"'Chupps' Hotel,' Soho Square, then," said Margaret.

The clerk was civil, for he was a judge of faces. He turned round a moment, opened the watch, looked for the hall-mark on the chain, tested one of its links on a touch-stone, and suggested eight pounds. "Will that do for you?"

"Oh yes, thank you," exclaimed Margaret, gratefully.

"You haven't a penny for the ticket?"

"No."

In a moment seven sovereigns, a quantity of silver, and some pence were pushed over the counter along with a little yellow ticket in a square envelope. The transaction had not lasted five minutes, but it placed Margaret in possession of what seemed to her a fortune. She had entered the pawnshop in fear and humiliation, and came out almost joyful, as if she had been treated with unusual kindness.

With money came a sense of security. She was still minded to discover Barby, because she was in need of a companion of her own sex who could act temporarily as her servant. She dreaded to be alone, lest she should be kidnapped; indeed what she most desired of Barby was protection.

Too tired to walk any more, she took a cab and drove to "Chupps' Hotel." Half-an-hour afterwards she was installed in a sitting-room before a good fire, and had ordered a waiter to bring her some tea and some stationery. The name which she gave to be entered on the hotel books was Mrs. Forester, and she added that the new chambermaid, Barbara, had been formerly in her service, and that she desired to see the girl as soon as she came home.

CHAPTER LV.

"CHUPPS' HOTEL."

"CHUPPS' HOTEL" was like most other houses in Soho Square of ancient date, and would have been none the worse for a good bath of whitewash. The cracks on its façade looked like wrinkles of decrepitude, the grime of a century had thickened in its chinks, there were patches near the roof which sweated damp. Chupps, its owner, was a retired courier, who had got the lease of the house cheap from an estate in bankruptcy, and had converted the place into a *café restaurant* and a lodging-house for seedy foreigners. The spacious dining-room on the left of the door, as well as the back room which looked on to a yard, had been thrown into one, and composed the *café*. It had a separate entrance by means of a flying iron bridge of six steps over the area, and a glass door on which were painted the names of divers French periodicals to be read within; also the words, "*Chupps, Limonadier,*" and "*Billard.*" The stranger who passed through the door found himself in a saloon furnished with red velvet settees blackened and worn with age, small tables with grey marble tops, innumerable square spittoons of red wood, and two greasy middle-aged waiters with round heads and white aprons. The place reeked of tobacco, beer, and liqueurs seldom drunk by Englishmen, such as *absinthe*, *vermouth*, and *cassis*. A round stove rose on the middle of the sanded floor in the front room, diffusing a stifling warmth, better suited for silkworms than

human beings, and in front of the fire-place, which was no longer used, stood a mahogany *comptoir*, raised on a dais, where sat a dark-eyed French girl, generally knitting, as she presided over rows of small cruets filled with brandy, and little silvered plates piled up with thin squares of loaf sugar. Sometimes a buxom French lady of forty, with red cap-strings and a black moustache, sat wheezing in the girl's stead, and this was Mrs. Chupps, better known to the *habitués* as Madame Shüpes.

Chupps himself was more often running about the hotel with his hair on end than attending to the *café*. The son of an Englishman and a Swiss woman, who were themselves descended respectively from an Irishman and an Algerian Jewess, this short, plump landlord was a cross of many breeds, and his speech was a *salmi* of countless tongues. He wore the costume of a cook, white jacket, apron, and flat cap, though he seldom cooked, and strutted about the passages like a good-natured, moustached bantam, gesticulating incongruous orders for the comfort of his customers. He always looked in a passion, and was never angry. His voice had the screeching compass of a cockatoo's, his polyglot oaths would have made the statue of a saint shudder, but his jokes would have tickled a stuffed bird into smiling. Chupps had a foible, which was to think that his lodgers, mostly French exiles, found in his house all that could remind them of their native land and console them for being expelled from it. He was generously anxious to foster this illusion in their bosoms, for he sympathized with political misfortune, having nearly been hanged himself by the Austrians in Venice, and afterwards nearly shot by the Party of Order in Paris during the June rebellion of 1848. Perhaps Chupps was a bit of an exile himself, though he denied the soft impeachment. While the Second Empire lasted his house had been full of Republicans. Plots were hatched there. Men with more principles than linen drew up on the marble tables of its *café* projects of constitution and proclamations to the down-trodden proletariat. In its private dining-rooms political banquets were held at three shillings a head, and possibly Chupps had an inkling of a certain conspiracy that was brewed to assassinate the Emperor, for one morning he was marched off to Bow Street, to account for a collection of explosive shells that were found in his coal-cellar. But he got off by defending himself with a gush of language which no magistrate could understand nor interpreter translate, and from that day forth "he mocked himself not ill of police courts," as he said. Since the Empire had collapsed, Chupps' Republican patrons had taken wing to swoop down on posts of dignity and emolument, and

their rooms had been filled by Bonapartist refugees of the humbler and baser sort. Corsican police spies, who might have been lynched had they remained in France; petty officials who had abused their authority to persecute Liberals who were now in power, and in a position to retaliate on them; soulless officers who had run away from the war under pretext that their convictions would not allow them to serve a Republic, and who were constantly posting begging letters to the Empress at Chislehurst, or to the captive Emperor at Wilhelmshöhe; these were the sort of men who lived, caroused, snored, and cursed their fate under Chupps' roof. Chupps did not like them, though they were better paymasters than the others. They played endless games of dominoes, drank beer and coffee all day, quarrelled with one another for a first sight of the newspapers from Tours and Brussels which brought war tidings, and sometimes compared the letters which they received from the besieged capital *per* balloon post. They were only in good spirits when they heard of their countrymen encountering some terrible defeat which boded a speedy termination to the war. For the gallant handfuls of men who were saving the national honour by a hopeless, though chivalrous, resistance they found only words of contempt and malediction. If Chupps, in his patriotism, ventured to hint that M. Gambetta was doing his duty they called him a revolutionary dog, and told him to be off to his saucepans.

Now Chupps, being an easy-going man, was rather surprised at receiving the visit of a Mrs. Forester, for English ladies were not often seen in his house, and a single lady without luggage was naturally a thing to wonder at. When the greasy Gascon waiter who had taken Margaret's orders repeated them to his master, the latter's curiosity was aroused. A lady who desired to see the new chambermaid, what could that mean? He prepared the tea, took some paper and envelopes, and carried the tray in person to the lady's sitting-room.

Margaret was seated near the fire. With the glance of an eye Chupps saw that she was young and pretty, and this made him gallant. A second glance revealed that she looked pale and unhappy, and this excited his interest. It was in a very considerate tone, and cap in hand, that he inquired whether he could do anything more for Madame, whether she expected luggage, whether she intended to honour his establishment by spending the night there?

Margaret answered that her movements were uncertain. She should want a letter posted by-and-by; meanwhile she only required some ink, please.

Chupps had forgotten the ink. He retired, apologizing, and presently reappeared with an ink-stand, and a copy of the *Times*, to beguile Madame's tedium, as he said. As for Barbara, he would take care that she should wait upon Madame immediately upon her return. Had he understood rightly that Barbara had once been Madame's servant?

"Yes, she was my servant. How came you to engage her?" replied Margaret.

"She presented herself in answer to an advertisement, and she had no character. Ah, Madame, my heart warms to the girl who has no character and who yet laughs. She laughed, and I took her. I do not think I shall repent."

"I am sure you will not; she is a hard-working girl."

"Madame's assurance is enough," said Chupps, bowing. "My experience is not favourable to the girl who comes with twelve certificates of virtue in her pockets and a hard look on her face. With the girl who laughs one is safe. Here, where the lodgers are foreigners, we must have a chambermaid who is pleasing to the sight, and does not mind pleasantries, which she does not understand. She must be English, knowing no language but her own, else the lodgers will joke with her and waste her time. She must smile, always smile, nothing more. Then they are content; so am I; everybody is content."

Chupps would have enlarged on his description of the "perfect chambermaid," but, with a foreigner's tact, he perceived that the lady was unwilling to pursue the subject. When he had gone, after another polite bow, Margaret sat musing for a while as to what manner of letter she should write to her parents.

The old reluctance, half shame, half pride, was stealing over her. If she had been in happy circumstances nothing would have withheld her from casting herself at the feet of her father and mother and craving their pardon. But it was bitter to implore their help as an outcast, having to confess that her life had been a total failure since she forsook their guidance. She could give them no proof that she was married, and it might well be that they would disbelieve this part of her story when the first gush of welcome had passed, and they came to judge her past conduct coldly. The Prodigal Son was feasted on the day of his return, but we are not told how he fared afterwards. If unkind reminders were poked at him, if his virtuous brother shook his head as he talked of fatted calves, there must have been days when the reprobate regretted the husks of affliction.

It is easier to confess a fault than to own that one has suffered by

committing it. Vanity prefers to accuse itself of sin sooner than to admit that it has erred through foolishness.

By degrees Margaret came to ask herself whether she would be made welcome at home after all. "They, perhaps, think me dead," she reflected, moodily. "I have not written to them for more than three years, and they have had time to console themselves. Violet had a baby when I last saw her; she must have others now, and all her affection is given to them—she will have none to spare for an erring sister. What will they say when they see me in this condition? I must tell them everything—the prison, the mad-house, the charge still hanging over me. Oh, it is dreadful! Papa will call me accursed. He used to be so puritan, and has had time to grow much more so now. Perhaps he will think that I have only come to him for money, and Violet may think so too. She will imagine that I want to frustrate her children of a share in our father's heritage. Oh, I would rather sweep the streets than let them believe that!"

The devil is always at hand to whisper evil suggestions to those who are in doubt as to whether they should do their duty. And pride is his medium. Margaret had never suffered unkindness from her parents or her sister: their love had been unquestionable, although their mode of evincing it was at times irksome to her; and yet now at the bidding of a wayward impulse she was ready to believe that her home might be made cold to her out of some miserable question of interest. A hard expression settled on the corners of her mouth.

She felt faint and poured herself out some tea. When she was a little refreshed, the hesitation to write still possessed her, and she mechanically took up the newspaper, letting her eyes wander over its front page. Then it was that Hazard, God's messenger, brought her tidings of peace as dew to a thirsty land.

The room was very still, and no strange eye was present to see the Prodigal Daughter, the abandoned wife, as she read the advertisement in which her parents recalled her to her home. It was the first line of print that met her gaze, and it spoke to her with such startling suddenness that the own voices of her father and mother would not have moved her more.

There was the message all brimming with affection:—

"Sybil H—, who left her home . . . is earnestly implored to communicate with her parents."

Margaret rose from her seat, her hands trembling so that she could hardly hold the paper to read the lines again once, twice, till

through the mist that blurred her sight every word became indistinct, and it was memory that repeated to her this appeal :—

"Father, mother, sister, all join their entreaties and send their love."

"I can't bear it!" she exclaimed, and tottering forward she fell with her face to the floor.

Here she was found soon afterwards by Barby Haggit, who, returning to the hotel to carry some purchases to her room, was told that a lady was waiting to see her. Barby did not go to the theatre that evening with her soldier; she sat watching by the bedside of Margaret, who was in a high fever and delirious.

* * * * *

Michael Christy and Isaac Hawthorne had set out in search of Margaret together.

Inquiries at the "Black Lamb" put them on the track of Barby, and they ascertained that a lady, whom they suspected to be Margaret, had already been seeking for the girl. They arrived at "Chupps' Hotel" some four-and-twenty hours after the patient's fever had set in, and they found the hotel in considerable commotion because of it. But faithful Barby had told no one where and how she had known "Mrs. Forester." She guessed that Margaret had fled from her persecutors, and this was enough to kindle all her sympathies. Not for all the gold in the world would she have betrayed the secret, or done aught to jeopardize her mistress's safety.

She started when summoned into the hall to see the chaplain of Tolminster Gaol, and she was at first disposed to resent any questions he might put her. But a few words from Michael reassured her: besides, the garrulous Chupps had already disclosed that a Mrs. Forester was lying very, very ill in his house. In the presence of this foreigner Barby vouchsafed no explanations, but she showed Isaac Hawthorne the way to his daughter's room. The old man went there alone with trembling but eager steps, Michael remaining down-stairs.

Margaret did not recognize her father; her mind was rambling, and she muttered incoherent words which proved how great a terror had long lain on her. Overcome and sobbing, the Quaker took her in his arms and pressed kisses on her hot brow.

"Oh my daughter—my Svbil dear—have I found thee thus stricken?" he wailed.

Then Barby Haggit spoke out with tears running down her cheeks faster than her apron could wipe them up.

"Oh, sir, you are the poor lady's father; take care that ill don't

happen to her again, for she has been treated shameful, and now t' doctor says she is like to die."

"Hush, my girl, our lives are in God's hands," replied the Quaker; "but I thank thee for thy kindness to my child, whereof Michael Christy hath spoken to me. So will her mother thank thee, for I must send for her this night."

"Her mother's alive then? - I am glad of that. She must have friendly faces to look on, sir, when her eyes see clear," said Barby.

"And ever afterwards, God willing," added the Quaker, with his handkerchief to his eyes.

That night, indeed, Mrs. Hawthorne came up from Crossbridge, and both the old people established themselves in the house to watch over their daughter, along with Barby, whose services they gratefully retained. "Chupps' Hotel" had never had such respectable lodgers under its roof.

CHAPTER LVI

A HERO'S DEATH.

MICHAEL returned to Tolminster. He sorrowed over Margaret's illness, but rejoiced that she had been restored to the care of those who loved her. He had now new duties to perform, for Edward Jasper's committal on the charge of murder rendered it inevitable that the facts which had led to this crime would be thoroughly sifted in public. Exposure had only been delayed, not warded off.

As Sir Wemyss Christy and Nelly would be sufferers by the coming events to as great an extent as Frank, Michael felt that his presence was necessary to comfort them. Nevertheless, on alighting at Tolminster his first visit was to the County Hospital, where Philip Forester lay. It was nine o'clock in the evening, but he met Frank coming out, and the latter shook his head.

"It's all up with him; he's an awful sight, poor fellow."

"Do the doctors give no hope for him?"

"None;" and he added after a pause, "I have seen Dr. Tabor to-day, Mr. Graham, and all of them. Mr. Graham and his daughter are in the hospital now. This affair has broken up the party at Faidale, so that uncle and Nelly have gone back to stay with you.

You will find them at your house. They know everything, and I'm a gone coon, Mike."

"You are aware, of course, that Jasper has been committed?" asked Michael.

"Yes, and I'd stake my head that he's innocent," exclaimed the dragoon, with fire. "It's that skunk Field who did the mischief and then bolted. I'll declare it in court."

"Don't be too sure."

"Oh, what have I to lose now? Uncle has forbidden me ever to speak to Nelly again. Mr. Graham looks at me as if I were a leper, and he evidently thinks I am the principal culprit. See, this is the last time I shall wear these togs." He opened his military cloak and showed his brilliant mess-costume beneath. "I dined at mess to-night just to hear what the fellows said. They talked about Phil's pluck at the fire. Buttery Jarnes, Gayleard, and others made some allusions to Jasper and looked queerly at me. To-morrow or next day they'll be talking of nothing else, and I shall have to step it. I've asked the Colonel for leave, and I'll send in my papers before I get kicked out—that is, if they'll let me."

"Don't be desperate, Frank," said Michael, kindly. "Things may turn out better than we expect."

"I'll pull poor Jasper out of his trouble if I swing for it," said Frank, with a break in his voice. "After that I don't care what happens to me."

They had walked away from the hospital and moved along the streets; they passed by the scene of the fire—the hosier's house, which had been gutted, and where Philip Forester had saved the old woman's life; then the cathedral, which towered grand and black in the night. Some people were looking at it from the opposite pavement. All day long crowds had streamed in from the neighbouring towns and villages to view the scene of Forester's heroic act, and the vergers had made a good harvest in showing sight-seers the spot in the belfry where the flames had been extinguished. Michael now halted in his turn under the porch and gazed upwards.

"Look," ejaculated Frank, with a burst of emotion as he pointed towards the tower, "the place in the belfry doesn't seem big enough for a cat to climb in, and it's so high that it made me almost sick when I went to see it. Well, Philip climbed hand over hand to the top of a lot of bells, and he put out the fire with his hands and feet. There isn't a whole spot in his body. His hair and eyebrows are gone, and if Rose Graham could see him she would swoon from fright. Luckily she can't see, but he will die of it, and I wish to

God I could do something in this style before I drop out of the ranks. It was a brave act, Mike, and you won't wonder any more why I liked Forester: fellows of such grit as his are not met with every day."

"It *was* a brave act," confessed Michael, carried away by enthusiasm, which deeds of courage always inspire to those who are themselves brave.

"And it wipes out a good many old scores, don't it?" added the dragoon. "If Philip wakes, and you see him before he breathes his last, let him down easily. It will be cruel if you don't."

"I will go and see him now," answered Michael pensively, as he turned. "It may be too late to-morrow, and I must see Mr. Graham; will you come?"

"No," said Frank, bluntly. "It seems I haven't the right to go and watch beside my chum. Mr. Graham as good as told me that he wished me to be off. Good night."

Frank was too moody to be talked with, and Michael parted from him, grieving that there was not much repentance in the reprobate, and yet touched by Frank's unwavering loyalty to his friend. He passed through the hospital gates, and having given his card to the assistant-physician on duty, was at once conducted to the chamber where Forester had been borne.

The Colonel had at first been placed in the ordinary accident ward, but when his identity was revealed by a signet-ring on his finger, the authorities caused him to be removed to a private room. Here he lay, not in a bed, but in a bath of oil. As he was a rich patient, expensive remedies could be tried with him, and fifteen gallons of Lucca oil had been taken to fill the bath. He was immersed in it up to his chin, arms and all. A sheet that was thrown over the bath allowed only his head to be seen.

It was a ghastly head—hairless, scorched, and covered with white blisters. The red-rimmed eyes were half closed; the lips, fearfully swollen, moved incessantly, as if the patient were chewing food. A medical student, who sat at the head of the bath, poured oil at intervals slowly over the face and scalp, letting it trickle in rivulets. When he was tired Mr. Graham or Lord St. Hubert, who were both in the room, in their shirt-sleeves, relieved him.

This had been going on for hours, but there was little hope of saving the patient's life. All that could be done was to alleviate pain, so that if he recovered consciousness he should die quietly.

When Michael entered Philip had just made a movement. His cousin and Mr. Graham were anxiously watching him as he rolled his head heavily from shoulder to shoulder. But nothing came of

it. The rocking gradually ceased, and the lips resumed their slow monotonous munching.

Mr. Graham shook hands sorrowfully with the chaplain, and lifted a forefinger to enjoin him to speak low. Prepared as Michael was for a sight of horrors, he had recoiled, thrilling at beholding Forester, and murmured some inarticulate words of pity.

"Hush!" whispered Mr. Graham, "my daughter is in the next room. She insisted on coming; nothing could stop her. Poor child, how she loves him! She is praying for him now."

"It must have been a great trial to her," said Michael, feeling how powerless speech was to express his compassion.

"She bore it very well, poor thing. God has sent her fortitude. She is proud of what Philip has done, and so am I, Christy."

"You have seen Dr. Tabor?" inquired Michael.

"Yes; he was here several hours, and spoke with great kindness. He seemed very anxious about his sister-in-law."

"She is found, and her parents are with her."

"I am glad of that," said Mr. Graham, rather drily. "I wish the unhappy woman no harm. Philip behaved very badly to her, but she must thank her own foolishness for a great deal of what has happened."

"Mrs. Forester is very ill," said Michael, gravely; "her sufferings have been too much for her."

"Well, she need not suffer any more. When the assizes come on I shall not appear against her in respect of the assault on my child, so she will be discharged."

"I did not expect less of your generosity, but it is a relief to me to hear this."

"Yes; but you must put no construction on my conduct favourable to that woman," ejaculated Mr. Graham, with hardly suppressed excitement. "I cannot forgive her for having blinded my child. I should not have a father's feelings if I forgave her. I see, by the way, that you talk of her as Mrs. Forester; I do not admit her claim to that title."

"It matters little now," remarked Michael, with a wave of his hand towards the bath.

"No. Philip is going to die," assented Mr. Graham; "but miracles are possible, and if he were to recover I should not take that Scotch marriage as proved, unless better evidence of it were forthcoming than we have at present. Lord St. Hubert here agrees with me."

Michael did not know Philip's cousin. Mr. Graham introduced the two men to each other, and the corpulent peer remarked gloomily

that he had been sorry to hear in what a bad business his cousin was involved. Mr. Graham had disclosed to him the particulars, which were very surprising, and painful, and so forth; but he did not consider that the Scotch marriage was anything better than a sham.

"I think—ahem—we shall do well to hush up as much as we can, Mr. Christy," he added. "It is very disagreeable for families when these things occur. The newspapers make an egregious fuss, you know."

"I have as much interest as you in hushing up the matter, but I am afraid a great deal will transpire at Jasper's trial," answered Michael, speaking almost in a whisper, as he had done throughout.

"Hush! here is my daughter coming," interrupted Mr. Graham. "Mind, Christy, she knows nothing of all this."

The door of the adjoining room had been softly opened and Rose Graham glided in, followed by her companion, Mrs. Merrewether. In her black silk dress with a small ruff, and the white bandage over her eyes, she came like an apparition that was not of this earth. Her hands were slightly extended, but she walked with sure steps, as if she had learned to dispense with a guide.

"Are you here, Mr. Christy?" she asked, in her sweet, quiet voice.

"Yes, Miss Graham;" and Michael advanced.

"I thought it was your voice that I heard. Thank you for having come. Is there any change, papa, dear?"

"No, my darling. You had better go back to Fairdale," said Mr. Graham, taking her hand, which Michael had just pressed with something akin to reverence.

"Oh no, I am strong and brave," she said, gently disengaging herself, and she approached the bath, where she stood still and listened. "He is breathing. Do you think he is in pain, Mr. Christy?"

"I think not. He is as though asleep," answered Michael.

"Perhaps he will hear me if I call;" and she called, with an accent of unutterable tenderness, "Philip!"

There was no reply. Rose stood motionless, and then turned towards the chaplain. "Are you wondering that I bear this calamity so well?" she said, in a tone indescribably pathetic. "I was to be a soldier's wife, you know, and Philip is dying a soldier's death. I somehow never thought we should be married. A presentiment of evil had been haunting me, and whenever I tried to look into the future there seemed to be a cloud that hid it. I told no one; but I now thank God that in taking Philip from me He has suffered him to die such a death. He has given his own for a fellow-creature's life. I have no right to murmur."

"You are one of God's own daughters, as He well knew when He afflicted you that your resignation might be an example to others," answered Michael with feeling.

"Oh no, I shall cry when I am alone, and perhaps repine, but not now," said Rose, with a faint serenity. Her lips quavered, however, and she sank into a seat which Michael brought her, and remained silent with her hands clasped and head inclined to catch the faintest breath that came from her lover who was dying.

She was praying and watching.

In the streets outside the traffic of day-time had subsided. The trumpet at the barracks sounded "lights out," and the cathedral clock chimed ten. It was night, and all the wards of the hospital were hushed. Other men and women were dying under that roof, but there was nothing to bring their pangs into communion with those of their richer fellow-sufferer, although their souls and his were to stand at the foot of the same Throne before long. Now and then light footfalls were heard along the passages as attendants went to and fro with medicines.

An hour passed, and then another. Rose remained praying, while Mr. Graham and Lord St. Hubert continued to take their turns at chafing the patient's burns. Occasionally they talked in whispers, and sometimes Rose would leave her place to draw softly near the bath as if she saw it. All her movements were graceful; it was difficult to realize that she was deprived of sight.

Once or twice she exchanged a few words with Michael, but only to break the oppressive monotony of the silence that haunted the room. When her questions had been answered she relapsed into prayer, the chaplain mutely joining her.

It was the duty of his priestly office to pray for the soul of this departing sinner, and he felt that it would be out of place to leave the room until all had been consummated. He stood with an elbow on the mantelshelf, and his brow resting upon his hand, and he prayed very fervently that Divine pardon might fall on Philip Forester, and that he himself might find grace to forgive him.

By-and-by he offered to repeat aloud the prayers for the visitation of the sick, and the proposal was thankfully accepted. Rose and her father knelt side by side, Mrs. Merrewether being near them; Lord St. Hubert and the surgeon remained standing, but in devout attitudes. Michael sank on his knees at the foot of the bath. He had no prayer-book, but he knew the beautiful liturgy by heart. As he lifted up his voice he fastened his eyes pityingly on the dying man's features, and he noticed that a change had come over them.

The end was approaching.

With it came a last glimmer of consciousness. God's presence in the midst of this small congregation gathered in His name must surely have diffused a ray of light into the soul which the darkness of death had encompassed. Philip opened his eyes, saw, heard, and essayed to speak. Rose divined what was happening and started to her feet. "Philip!" she exclaimed. "Rose," was his murmured answer, breathed with a look of undying love.

And this was the end.

Mr. Graham caught Rose in his arms to sustain her, but she glided from his embrace and dropped kneeling on the floor, with a sob in which all the grief of her love was poured out. It was a sob deep and yearning, a struggle of the heart that was alive to soar upwards with the heart that was gone.

None disturbed her silent communing with the departed spirit, and after a few minutes she rose. Her step was firm. She walked as the brides of soldiers must walk, when death has separated them from their bridegrooms for a time—until the last great call of the muster-roll.

The bereaved girl had found her comfort where she had always sought it before; and perhaps to her humble mind there was something natural in the fate that had deprived her of the lover whom she thought good and great beyond the wont of men. She would have forgotten the blindness which had been sent to try her, she would have been too happy if they could have lived together; and she acquiesced in her virgin widowhood, deeming herself blessed in having enjoyed Philip Forester's undivided love, and proud at being allowed to cherish his memory. Thus the blossoms of a tree pass, and the fruit comes after them, and whatever of bloom has faded off our earliest hopes is not gone if the fruit of resignation remains to bear seeds yielding fresh hopes of things everlasting. God does not afflict us when in taking away a bliss He endows us with unalterable serenity to bear His will; this is only like removing one flower to plant in its stead others of more enduring fragrancy.

Refined by the remembrance of Philip's hallowed death, Rose's love was henceforth to shine upon his memory with the warmth and brightness of sunlight. His faults she had never known, and now that he was gone his virtues were magnified, so that every thought in connection with him was tinged with reverence. As those marble statues larger than life which adorn the funereal monuments of heroes, so was Philip Forester to be enshrined in Rose Graham's heart; his lineaments godlike, all his proportions faultless, his expression immortally calm and lovable—the perfect embodiment of the soldier, Christian, and gentleman.

As Rose left the room, leaning on her father's arm, she turned to Michael with a melancholy smile.

"You were to have married us, Mr. Christy; I will ask you now to officiate at Philip's funeral."

* * * * *

The night was far spent when the chaplain returned to his prison home. He found Sir Wemyss sitting up for him in his study. Nelly had gone to bed crying as if her heart would break, said her father, because of Frank. Uncle and nephew remained conversing together until morning about the strange things that had befallen them, and the worse things that seemed to be in store. Sir Wemyss had to go several times to the window to take the seven full and deep breathings required for his health, for emotions such as those which he was now undergoing made him wild. A public exposure, his favourite nephew disgraced, branded as a criminal, and his daughter crying her eyes out for the scapegrace; there was enough here to modify his hankerings after longevity and to make him wish that he had gone to his grave long ago.

But the worthy gentleman was to be spared this blow, and Michael was also to be spared much of what he feared.

As he was preparing to set out for London in the morning, a policeman brought him the copy of a telegram which had been sent to the office, reporting that Edward Jasper had hanged himself in his cell at Newgate.

Master and man had died the same night, and at about the same hour; for it must have been towards midnight, when Philip Forester was being speeded to his rest amid loving benisons, that his faithful servant and victim, alone and abandoned, made away with himself.

Why had he done this desperate deed? Was it fear for himself, or an insane hope of serving his master, or a shame at his lost character worse than any personal fear? None could tell. When the warder went his rounds at eleven Jasper was alive in his cell and brooding; shortly after midnight he was dead, hanging to one of his iron hammock-rings by a bed-strap. He left no writing and had made no verbal confession. Men of his stamp die without any fuss, and as he was a lowly person nobody felt any interest in probing the reasons of his suicide. It was merely accepted as a proof of his guilt.

CHAPTER LVII.

AN APOLOGY.

JASPER being dead, the investigation into the Peterborough Street murder naturally came to an end. Betsy Dormer was discharged from police custody and vanished to take care of herself. There was nobody to accuse Captain Field, who never turned up again nor deemed it worth while to write from his transatlantic retreat in order to clear Jasper's memory. Frank Christy might have cleared it, but for obvious reasons he forbore to speak. The consequences of a crime like Forester's are not only other crimes, like the swindles by Riddel, the robbery by Redwood, the suicide by Jasper, but a whole mass of secresies and falsehoods. Frank Christy dared not render posthumous justice to Jasper lest he should compromise himself. Besides, he came to think that the wretched fellow was perhaps guilty after all. Everybody deemed the evidence of the housemaid conclusive, and it is profitless to hold an opinion against everybody, especially when one has an interest in being on everybody's side.

Of course society glozed a good deal on the mystery. It was talked about in clubs and drawing-rooms, and sundry people were very near to guessing the whole truth. But theirs was only conjecture, for, on the whole, the secret was well preserved, and nothing of it was bruited in the papers. When a social scandal is kept out of print it may be compared to those convulsions which spend their rage under water, and only reveal themselves on the surface by bubbles.

In time the bubbles burst.

Frank Christy's position amongst his brother officers was not affected (though Buttery Jarnes did eye him askance and launch innuendoes), and he might have remained in the regiment if his uncle had allowed it; but the Baronet was inexorable in declaring that punishment must be inflicted. Frank was taken as scapegoat. Once the danger of a public exposure had gone by, Sir Wemyss, Mr. Graham, Lord St. Hubert, and even Dr. Tabor were unanimous in agreeing that justice of some sort must be wreaked on him whom they were pleased to consider as the worst of the two culprits. Banishment was the penalty which they edicted. Frank must throw up his commission and go abroad to begin life again as he pleased, or as he could.

Margaret might have concurred in this sentence, but she was too

ill to be consulted. Michael Christy's only ally in pleading mercy for his brother was Isaac Hawthorne. The Quaker did not hold with the theory of punishments.

All that he desired of Frank was that the latter should speak veraciously about the Scotch marriage, and after that be a good man and offend no more.

"We shall never sow such seeds of repentance in thy brother's heart as God Himself will put there if we leave all things to Him," he said to Michael. "Our own rough chastenings will only uproot God's seeds, and put weeds of bitterness instead."

Michael and Isaac Hawthorne had become fast friends. They often saw each other in the week that elapsed between Forester's death and burial, for whenever the chaplain could tear himself away from his prison duties he travelled to London to inquire how Margaret was progressing. The fever went its course slowly, and anxious nights were spent in the sick-room by the Quaker and his wife. Violet and her children had come up to town, and put up at "Chupps' Hotel," which was becoming quite a decent dwelling. Its French *habitués* stole down the stairs with quiet steps, and saluted the Quaker respectfully when they met him. Chupps talked of the old gentleman as a "brave homme," a true apostle of equality, perfect in all things save his belief in Divine governance, which Chupps considered a weakness.

At one of his visits Michael was accompanied by Sir Wemyss Christy, who felt it incumbent on him to offer the Quaker a formal apology for his nephew's misdoing. He called this eating humble pie for the honour of the family. Nelly was obliged to travel with her father, lest, being left at Tolminster, she should find means to see Frank—girls being irrational and untrustworthy in love matters, as the Baronet profoundly remarked. She made no great objection to this arrangement, the truth being that she and Frank had established a daily correspondence through the medium of a third party. Obstacles lend a spur to love, and Nelly did not care a whit what all the world might say, since she had set up a conclusive opinion of her own as to Frank's entire blamelessness. She thought him shamefully ill-used; she admired his stanch devotion to his friend Forester; her hazel eyes flashed when her father burst out into invectives against her betrothed. Nelly was minded to let these gusts of paternal wrath blow over, and therefore held her peace; but in letters four pages long she exhorted Frank to keep up his spirits, and *never, never* to doubt her, which epistles brought comfort and hope to the reprobate. He assured her in his replies that but for her constancy he should be tired of living.

There is no reason for concealing that the postman who carried the letters between Nelly and Frank was Michael, and he did this without any compunction. He much wished his brother to marry Nelly; and he knew well enough that Sir Wemyss's surrender would be only a question of time.

So Nelly remained alone at a West End hotel, while Michael and her father proceeded to Chupps'. The two men found Mr. Vigus and his dog with the Quaker, but nobody else was present. Mrs. Hawthorne and Violet were both in the sick-room. The interview had been expected by the Quaker, and it would have begun cordially but for Sir Wemyss, who thought it right to assume the ceremonious demeanour of a punctilious gentleman who comes to make *amende honorable*.

He favoured the Quaker with a bow, and in a rather Grandisonian style expressed his sincere regret that any kinsman of his should have so heinously offended. But Isaac Hawthorne cut him short.

"Friend, I beg thee to sit down. If thy kinsman Francis hath offended, his brother Michael hath made ample atonement. Thou needest not apologize."

"I am touched by your generosity, Mr. Hawthorne," answered the Baronet, taking a seat, "but my nephew shall learn that misdemeanours like his are not committed with impunity."

"Friend, if he hath not learned that already, nothing that thou canst do will teach him," replied the Quaker mildly, as he wiped his spectacles on the tail of his coat. "When I was in the bondage of sin I thought men could be chastened with stocks and stones. Verily, I believe now that with a little kindness thou mayest bend the neck of the stubbornest sinner, and I would bid thee give thy daughter Helen in marriage to Francis Christy. When he hath children to guide he will walk straight."

"Nice children they would be if they took after their father," grumbled the Baronet.

"Friend, children are an heritage and gift of the Lord."

"And the sins of their fathers are visited on them to the third and fourth generation, Mr. Hawthorne. It is hard upon the innocents."

The Quaker shook his head. "Read the 18th chapter of Ezekiel, friend. When a man turneth from his wickedness that he hath committed, his sin shall no more be had in remembrance. Thy nephew will turn if thou givest him a helping hand, but beware if thou sendest him forth as an outcast, lest he be numbered among those who forget God, having found no pity among his own people and in his father's house."

"With those theories we should make the path of evil-doers too smooth, Mr. Hawthorne," replied the Baronet, shortly. "I will show pity, but not till I have seen signs of repentance. How is your daughter to-day? I need not tell you how sincerely I hope for her recovery."

"That wish makes us all kin, friend," replied the Quaker. "My poor Sybil is neither better nor worse. The Lord's hand hath been heavy on her, but her mother and sister and her servant Barbara are nursing her, and the doctors do not despair."

The interview was not prolonged, for there was some awkwardness in Sir Wemyss's position. He had been accustomed to hold his head high in the sight of all men, but here he stood, through his nephew's fault, like one open to rebuke. Much as he might admire the Quaker's philosophy, he did not relish its application to himself, for at sixty men do not like to be lectured. The less so when they are philosophers themselves, as worthy Sir Wemyss was.

He rose, and with old-fashioned courtesy thanked his host for his reception, and wished him good-bye. Sir Wemyss, like gentlemen of the last century, wore loose gloves, which he pulled off on entering a room, so that he might offer a bare hand. He always left his stick or umbrella in the hall, and would have thought it uncouth to enter or retire from an apartment without a marked bow. He expected reciprocal politeness, being very touchy on all the points that mark good breeding, and was a little shocked when the Quaker said, "Thou needest not make any fuss with me, friend; I shall always be glad to see thee again, though I pay no compliments other than thou mayest infer from my welcome."

Michael had been talking to his brother clergyman, who had come to constitute himself the errand-runner of Mrs. Hawthorne and Violet during their stay in town. His thoughts, however, were away in the sick-room where Margaret lay. No motive but that of hearing and talking of Margaret brought him so often to visit the Quaker, and when the conversation wandered away from the patient Michael was absent-minded. He was not conscious of this. He said Yes or No mechanically to questions without being aware that he frequently replied amiss, and that occasionally questions had been put him twice before he vouchsafed a rejoinder.

Isaac Hawthorne had been informed by his wife that Mr. Christy was certainly in love with their daughter, and he would now and then watch the chaplain with a side-glance, rubbing his ear pensively the while. He wished Michael would speak out, that there might be less restraint between them, though he was not prepared to say offhand, "Take my daughter and make her happy." That consum-

mation would depend on Margaret herself; but since Forester was dead, and his wife a widow, the Quaker, with his plain notions of truth-telling, would have been better pleased if the chaplain had confessed straightforwardly whether he cherished any purpose of offering his hand to a woman who had been in prison. It was so long since he had been a lover himself that he forgot how that kind are wont to act.

"Friend," he said, as they parted, "I have somewhat to ask of thee. If, God willing, my child's health improveth, I will go to Tolminster, for I would fain see the cell where she passed those months in sorrow. It is her mother's wish that I should do so. I would also see the forge where unwillingly she blinded Rose Graham. If possible I will come to thee on the day of Philip Forester's funeral."

"That is on Thursday," said Michael.

"Well, this is Monday, and between now and then there may be a change in Sybil. I deem it right that I should follow my daughter's husband to his grave. There must be good-will between us now that he is dead, lest when we meet in Paradise he reproach me."

"That Quaker is an odd creature," remarked Sir Wemyss to his nephew, as they sallied out of "Chupps' Hotel" arm in arm; "I—I confess I should not like him for a companion."

"See how two good men may differ," said Michael, who was surprised at this criticism.

"Well, well, I hope sententious goodness is not necessary to one's salvation," replied the Baronet, gloomily. "Quakers, Methodists, and Radicals have always been beyond me. Is his daughter like him?"

"Margaret?"

"Yes, Margaret."

"I believe she is as pure in heart as her father," said Michael, with a tell-tale flush which his uncle did not observe, "but she does not talk like him."

"Humph, that is fortunate, else one could almost account for Forester's deserting her. You see marriages between persons of different rank don't answer, my boy. It's of no use to say they do; they don't. That, however, doesn't excuse Forester's conduct, which was blackguardly. Chivalry is due even to a little Quakeress."

"Margaret is not a Quakeress," said Michael.

"Well, to a Quaker's daughter then. I see we do not think quite in harmony on this point, Mike. That comes of your being young, and a parson, you see." And the honest gentleman coughed a little testily.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A MAGISTERIAL ULTIMATUM.

It was painful to Michael that he and his uncle did not think alike. He looked upon Margaret as a woman whom persecutions had elevated to saintship, but no one else outside her own family took this view of her case.

Mr. Graham and Lord St. Hubert she was a termagant adventurer; to Sir Wemyss, who was usually so indulgent about women, a troublesome person; to Frank Christy and Mrs. Baillie, a mere minx. Even now that Forester was dead Frank declined to own that he had witnessed anything like a marriage in Scotland. He maintained that he had witnessed a "spree," and no amount of pressing would induce him to modify that statement.

Michael saw, with deep regret, that his hopes of getting the Scotch marriage so far proved that Margaret's position as a widow would be privately recognized by those who knew her must be abandoned.

But this was not all, for Margaret's enemies being many and strong, their ill-will leaked out in ways which turned against Michael himself. Mrs. Baillie, for instance, having recovered from her fright and shed the proper quantity of tears over Forester's untimely fate, bethought her that to live in peace in a prison where the chaplain despised her was impossible. Michael scarcely spoke to her now. He passed by her in the wards with a cold bend of the head, and limited his conversation strictly to matters of business. He asked Miss Keyser to play the harmonium in her stead at the singing-classes; it was evidently his intention never more to re-establish her on an intimate footing. A woman cannot stand this from a man whom she had hoped to marry. It served the matron nothing that the chaplain kept the secret that might have ruined her; she was humiliated; she felt peevishly towards him, and threw out ill-natured hints to the visiting justices about his disturbing influence on the female prisoners. Dr. Hardy, without meaning harm, spoke to the same effect; and Mr. Barker, the schoolmaster, who meant harm, because Michael was keeping him in order, went about Tolminster saying that there were pretty games at the county gaol since a good-looking bachelor chaplain had been turned loose among the women.

Many pious Methodist tradesfolks, glad of anything that could

point a moral against the Established Church, set down Michael Christy as a pasha for whom a harem was provided out of the rates. They and their wives said the most imaginative things on this subject over their teas.

Meantime Mr. Graham, without actually censuring Michael, whom he liked and esteemed, let fall a few words, which dropped into George Armstrong's ear, about the undue interest which the chaplain had taken in Margaret Field. Now George Armstrong was one of the shrewd section of society who had guessed more than they heard about the recent mysteries, and he had come to the conclusion that "the woman Field" had been somehow the indirect cause of Forester's death—a monstrous thing truly, for Forester was being extolled as a hero throughout the land. Not wishing to act, however, without being on safe ground (for he was a prudent man), Mr. Armstrong sounded Sir Wemyss as to his opinion of his nephew's fitness for the gaol chaplaincy, and discovered that the Baronet was far from desirous of seeing Michael retain the post. He had been opposed all along to Michael's living in a prison; he would be glad to see him leave it.

The upshot of this was, that at a meeting of visiting justices (*i. e.* of George Armstrong and of Admiral Woodstock) held on the day before Forester's funeral, a resolution was passed, calling upon the chaplain to state whether there was any probability that, within a reasonable time, he would enter into the estate of matrimony.

As this resolution was recorded on the minute-book, it was tantamount to a notice that Michael must marry or resign, and he took it as such, though George Armstrong communicated it to him in the most unofficial, friendly way.

Mr. Armstrong had not forgiven Nelly for rejecting him, and, privately, he wished the Christys no good; otherwise he would have scouted Mrs. Baillie's tattle and administered a reprimand to Mr. Barker.

"You see, there has been something like a scandal," he said confidentially to Michael, in the latter's office, "and we can't afford to have such things in a prison."

"Neither here nor elsewhere," answered Michael. He was offended, but would not show it. "I will take time to give you an answer."

"That's it—take time. Of course if you marry we shall be delighted to see you remain in a place where you are doing so much good. The men are twice as well behaved since you succeeded Jabbot."

"I suppose the magistrates are not particular as to whom I take to wife?" asked Michael, quietly.

"Oh no, you may please yourself."

"I thought perhaps the justices might have some person to recommend."

George Armstrong laughed. "We will discuss the subject at the next quarter sessions if you like. What kind do you prefer—the stout and jolly, or the thin and languorous? I won't promise that the county will endow her, but we will advertise for a girl with large eyes and sound views on Church questions. Talking seriously, though, Christy, I am afraid we must ask you to resign if you don't marry. It will not be a hardship to you, for your uncle can easily get you a living."

"Oh, do not disturb yourself on my account," replied Michael, drily, though he smiled. "I shall probably marry."

"Ah, well, so much the better."

"That depends."

"Yes, it depends on whether you like marriage," laughed Mr. Armstrong.

There the matter ended for the time.

Till then Michael had not seriously asked himself whether he wished to marry Margaret. No word of love had passed between them; they had parted in anger so far as she was concerned, and it was doubtful whether her resentment against him and his would ever die out. She was a woman of quick impulses and deep sensibility, who had evidently loved Forester with all her heart. Would there ever be room in her affections for another image beside his?

Yet Michael had long loved Margaret without avowing it to his own conscience, and now that he could own it, since she was a widow, he saw that he loved her, but that the obstacles to his suit would be very many.

George Armstrong's ultimatum brought him to this dilemma: was there any woman on earth whom he would desire as a wife? And he answered, Margaret. Then came this other dilemma: What would the world say if he, a clergyman and a gaol chaplain, married a woman against whom a criminal charge had been preferred, who had been certified as a lunatic, and to whose antecedents much disreputable mystery would cling?

Obviously such a match would seem scandalous, and Michael would have to throw up his chaplaincy. Sir Wemyss, Nelly, Frank even, would feel insulted and decline to hold any terms with Margaret. She would be a pariah in her husband's family.

So, because a woman had been persecuted, being innocent, a stain must remain on her character which nothing could efface! She must be regarded as unfit to be an honest man's wife. The slander of the mischievous, of the ill-informed, the sneers of the foolish, the disdain of the prude, must bar the way to her rehabilitation, and to her life's end she must tread the path of thorns!

Michael's blood boiled at the thought, and it was when it flashed upon him that Margaret might not be any other honest man's wife that he resolved she should be his own. This should be his atonement, his expiation for his brother's sin. By Frank's fault she had been numbered among the outcast: it was now for the sinner's brother to give her back her proper rank and title to respect in the face of the whole world. These things to the chaplain seemed plain.

And if Michael had ever gloried in his family name, in the spotlessness of his own reputation, in his pecuniary circumstances, which rendered him independent, it was at this moment when he saw that he might offer these things as an atonement to a prisoner.

His relatives would have to bear it as they could. After all the world was wide, and the loss of his chaplaincy would not impoverish him. He could obtain a living by favour or purchase, or emigrate to the colonies. Not but that he would be sorry to leave the prison, for his heart was in his work, and it seemed to him that the fitness of things would be best served by Margaret's coming to help him in the abode of misery where she herself had suffered. The female prisoners would find a friend in her who could understand their woes, nor underrate the temptations to which they had succumbed. This, however, of course could not be.

So far Michael reasoned as if it were certain that Margaret would accept him, but by-and-by the humility of love returned and caused him to doubt. A letter lay before him, in which Isaac Hawthorne announced that the crisis in Margaret's illness had arrived, and that if the patient surmounted it he would travel to Tolminster the following day to attend Philip Forester's funeral. "Sybil hath fallen into a deep sleep," wrote the old man, in concluding. "If it please the Lord that she awake, the doctors assure that her health will be restored. Barbara Haggit hath tended her devotedly. I beg thee not to forget that I will visit the Cell 15 whereof thou hast often spoken to me."

In the gloom of a winter's day, amidst cares for other things,—work to be done, prisoners to be visited, schedules to be filled up,—Michael re-read this letter and awaited the telegram that was to inform him that Margaret had passed through her crisis. It came in the evening, and was sent by Mrs. Hawthorne. She had guessed

how anxious the chaplain would be if left in suspense through the night, and he was touched by her thoughtfulness, which made it appear as if he were already reckoned one of the family.

The message ran :—" *Our Sybil is awake, and has recognized us. Heaven be praised that she is saved.*"

Late as it was, Michael drafted a reply, and carried it himself to the telegraph office, which was just about to close. It was a cold raw night, with signs of snow overhead. Few people were abroad, and the prison with its scattered lights loomed grimly over the city. Walking back to it, Michael felt cold and desolate, despite the load of apprehension that had been removed from his breast.

What if Margaret should refuse him?

He mused that he would tell the Quaker of his hopes and fears, and do so at the moment when they were both in Cell 15. It was almost his duty now to inform Isaac Hawthorne that he loved his daughter, and by choosing the cell as the spot for his declaration he would prove that he was not acting upon impulse, but only after full consideration of the circumstances of Margaret's position. But as he computed the chances of his suit being accepted his heart failed him. Margaret was proud, and it might not suit her dignity to accept an offer which might look like an alms. This apart from all questions of love.

"I was wrong to think of it as an atonement," Michael reflected, humbly. "Atonement implies sacrifice, and there is none here. The sacrifice will come from her if she consents to forget all the wrong that Frank has done her. Why should she be proud to marry me? How can she love me at all unless the sight of my own love touches her? But months must pass before then—perhaps years."

Years! a weary tract of desert in the length of time—a prospect most dreary to lovers. It made Michael Christy sigh.

He went to see whether Cell 15 was in a fit state for inspection. He would have had it cleaned and furbished throughout, so that it might look like a sanctuary. Mrs. Baillie admitted him, and said that Fifteen was tenanted. A drunken hag just arrived was pounding at the door and shrieking.

"Why have you put that drunken woman in this cell of all others?" asked Michael, almost fiercely. His lips were white.

"Was it your wish that it should remain for ever empty?" asked the matron, with provoking coolness.

"I should have wished——" but he saw how unreasonable was his pretension, and he found a subterfuge. "Drunken women ought not to be admitted off-hand like that into the ward. She

should have spent her first night in the admission cells. She will disturb the rest of the others."

"The admission cells are under repair. I know my duties, Mr. Christy."

"There must be vacant cells in the upper ward. Mr. Hawthorne is coming to-morrow and desires to see the cell where his daughter lingered."

"Oh, if you want to convert it into a show-place——"

"I said nothing about a show-place, Mrs. Baillie."

"You may turn it into a chapel for all I care, and put Margaret Field's statue above the altar," cried the matron, exasperated. "Ask the visiting justices to let you do that, Mr. Christy; meanwhile, allow me to manage my wards in my own way, if you please."

"I am not going to bandy words with you, Mrs. Baillie."

"The less the better, sir."

"You are strangely forgetting yourself."

"Other people whom I could name act strangely too, Mr. Christy."

Michael turned on his heel, and Mrs. Baillie hurried to her parlour to have a good cry. She could not contain herself when Margaret Field was alluded to. If the dialogue had continued she would have exceeded the bounds of mere rudeness. Of all the infatuated, unjust, aggravating men she had ever met she now thought Michael Christy the worst.

This did not prevent her from turning the drunken woman out of the cell; and in the morning she set a couple of prisoners to clean it in every corner. They were at work an hour—swabbing, dusting, scouring, polishing. The brasses shone, the little deal table was white as a platter, the hammock stood neatly rolled on its shelf.

Then the place looked pure as the virginal cell of a nun.

Prison rules forbid any men excepting officials to visit the female wards, but these regulations were waived by the governor in Isaac Hawthorne's favour. When the Quaker arrived, Michael conducted him to the F wing, and Miss Mac Craik having opened the cell door (for Mrs. Baillie kept out of the way), left them alone.

Isaac Hawthorne's breath came and went fast as he crossed the threshold, shading his eyes with his hands because of the glare of the whitewash. He took a calm survey of the place, read the prison rules on the hook, opened a Bible that lay on the shelf, tapped the walls with his finger to test their thickness, and finally sat down on the three-legged stool.

"Friend," said he, "this is a dismal place."

It was very dismal, for the grey sky threw not one golden gleam

on the walls, and the air was chilly. Isaac Hawthorne removed his broad-brimmed hat and stroked his head thoughtfully, while Michael began to tell him of the interviews he used to hold with Margaret. She would sit outside there in the passage, and there was a baby child in the prison who sometimes came and played at her knees. On certain days she was almost cheerful, and laughed sweetly; on others there was such a sadness in her eyes that it was like apathy.

"I often talked to her of her father and mother," continued Michael, whose voice quavered a little, "but I am afraid I never succeeded in conveying to her how deep an interest I felt in her troubles. Circumstances eventually made it appear as if I were her enemy."

"She doth not think thou art her enemy," replied Isaac Hawthorne. "Her mother and I told her this night that it was thou who restoredst her to us. She is woefully weak, but she understood us."

"And what did she say?"

"I must not mislead thee, friend: she said nothing, but she cried."

"Everything about her interests me, Mr. Hawthorne; shall I tell you why?" said Michael.

"Nay, friend, thou lovest our daughter. Her mother guessed it, and did tell me. Thou needest not beat about the bush to learn that I would gladly have thee for a son-in-law." That is how the Quaker answered.

Michael did not require to tell the old man how his love had arisen, and what he hoped from it. With the Quaker rambling statements and reticences were out of place. He always came straight to the point, for his godliness was not unmixed with the shrewdness bred of his past life as a merchant. Nor was he quite so unworldly as to ignore that in offering to marry his daughter, Michael Christy was trampling many conventional prejudices underfoot, and giving proof of a courage which entitled him to a father's gratitude. Only he doubted quite as much as Michael what Margaret's sentiments would be.

"Thou must have patience, friend," he concluded, after they had conversed awhile longer. "Our poor Sybil—or Margaret, if thou preferrest to call her by that name—hath passed under the harrows, and her pangs are not yet ended. She will have to take her trial on a criminal charge, which grieveth me to think of. Give her time to collect herself, and to know thee."

"I trust she will not refuse to see me," remarked Michael, rather despondently.

"Nay, she will not refuse. Thou shalt come and visit us at Ivy House, and, knowing thee better, I doubt not that she will love thee more." He added quaintly, "Not that women love men for their qualities, else divers men whom I have met would have remained unmarried. And now, friend, let us go to the funeral. They tell me Philip Forester is to be buried in the cathedral."

"Yes," said Michael, "the Dean and Chapter have decided to bury him at the foot of the belfry, which he saved, and a monument is to be erected to him there."

Michael was to read part of the burial service, by the Dean's permission. After a last look at Cell 15, the Quaker and he left the prison together in a fly. It was snowing thickly. The flakes fell in serried millions, hiding the country around, and the tolling of the minster-bell sounded like the gloomy signals in a sea-fog.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL.

It had been decided to give Philip Forester a splendid funeral.

The corporation of Tolminster vied with the Dean and Chapter in their desire to honour the memory of a man who had saved a national monument from destruction. The mayor was to follow the coffin in his state robes. The local volunteers and the 12th Dragoons lined the streets between the county hospital and the minster. All the shops were closed, and black flags floated half-mast high on the public buildings.

The road along which the procession passed was densely thronged despite the blinding snow. A very tornado of flakes descended at the hour appointed for the ceremony, but the people stood their ground. The coffin was borne out from the hospital on the shoulders of eight men, its black pall surmounted by the sword and plumed hat which the deceased had worn as a staff officer. There was no hearse, but the coffin was preceded by the mounted dragoon band playing the dead march in "Saul." The pall-bearers were Mr. Graham, Sir Wemyss Christy, some tenants of chapter lands, and Isaac Hawthorne. The Quaker took this duty upon himself with a quiet authority which none ventured to dispute, although it was not known by what right he came there. Mr. Graham knew

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(for Michael whispered an explanation), and he avoided coming into contact with Margaret Field's father.

Lord St. Hubert walked bareheaded as chief mourner, and behind came a long string of carriages, whose horses trod noiselessly in the deep carpet of snow. Frank Christy was in command of the Guard of Honour at the minster door. Erect in his saddle, with his helmet on his head, and his sword drawn, it was he who had to give the word to "Salute" when his comrade's body was borne past him. He had not shirked this duty which his Colonel had laid on him, thinking it might soothe his feelings. So it did, for he was glad to do his friend a public homage. He lifted his gauntlet to his helmet-peak and lowered his sword's point towards the ground—much troubled within, but outwardly cold in his respectful demeanour. Only a very close observer could have watched how his lips quivered as he murmured, "Good-bye, Phil."

The cathedral was crowded. Excepting the stalls of the clergy and choir, and about fifty reserved seats for the convoy, all the seats were filled with townspeople and members of the county gentry in deep mourning. Nelly Christy all in black sat near the pulpit with the Armstrongs. Rose Graham was of course not present, for her blindness debarred her from taking any part in a public ceremony. Her appearance would have produced a theatrical effect repugnant to her true grief and modesty; but she had sent a large crown of violets, which her father by-and-by deposited in the grave.

The ringers had not yet ceased ringing their muffled chime when the salute of the dragoons and the last strains of the band signalled the approach of the body. So perfect was the handling of the bells that even in the snow-swept heavens the sounds swelled and died away. The ringing ceased, and throughout the cathedral a profound silence reigned while the choir were gone, as the Prayer-book orders, to meet the body outside. They returned through the south porch, in deference to the old belief that the light of day ought to shine on the body to the very last moment. Dean, clergy, choristers, bearers, mourners passed over strewn rushes, and the coffin was carried up the nave to its catafalque in the choir, the entire congregation rising, and the organ playing Clement's "De Profundis."

Tolminster Cathedral had grown through many generations, but the greater part of it was in the early decorated style, at once solid and ornate. The font was a work of rich sculpturing; the screen was open, and so the whole length of the building, about 400 feet, could be seen at one view. But the fair proportions of the fabric were best studied from under the central tower, where the bewildering number of pillars, which at a cursory glance seemed arranged

with no more order than clumps of forest trees, were seen to be drawn out in regular rows, pointing to the cardinal points of the compass. From this distance the grand windows of the east and west shone out magnificently with their stained glass of Dutch make. The pavement was new, but no one would have known it from ancient work. Nothing told of decay in the whole fabric save the tombs of cross-legged knights with their feet resting on *couchant* hounds, or of mitred bishops with hands folded in prayer. Nothing recalled the troubles of the world outside except a few old helmets hung on the walls of the dark aisles, and some inscriptions on half-defaced brasses, which recorded disasters and sorrows long gone by, and served to remind the chance reader of what a short life we live, and how fleeting are the woes which consume our best days on earth.

The funeral service commenced with the 90th Psalm, which was sung to an ancient chant suited to simple words. After the wailing notes of the Old Testament lament had died away, the New Testament lesson, speaking of the second life, followed without pause. This was read by Michael Christy, who thus fulfilled his promise to Rose Graham. He stood at the great bronze lectern, formed of an eagle with outstretched wings, and his voice sounded gravely and impressively all through the building. An appropriate stress was laid by him on certain verses of that beautiful lesson taken from the 15th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trump. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

The rest of the service was performed by the clergy of the chapter. At the words, "In the midst of life we are in death," the coffin was raised from its trestles, and the procession, re-forming, wended its way to the grave in the belfry tower. Once more the congregation stood and heard the unearthly music of the organ playing in imitation of the human voice: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." It was grand and solemn.

There was not room in the tower for the crowds who thronged towards it to witness the last scene of the burial. Around the open grave the surplices of choristers and clergy made a white circle. The wintery air was fragrant with flowers, for the school-children of Fairdale and Tolminster held nosegays of hot-house plants which they littered upon the coffin as it descended into the vault. Other bystanders threw sprigs of bay and laurel. For a moment these offerings fell in a shower so thick that the coffin was completely

hidden, and the handfuls of earth which the sextons cast in at the words "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," made no noise. Now it was that a fit sequel was added to this demonstration, for a vergers, stepping forward as soon as the Dean had spoken the blessing, pulled aside a veil which concealed a marble tablet affixed to the wall. The people read these words on it:

BENEATH THIS SPOT
ARE BURIED THE REMAINS OF
Cient-Colonel Philip St. Hubert Forester,
WHO DIED OF INJURIES RECEIVED WHILE
BRAVELY SAVING
THIS CATHEDRAL
FROM DESTRUCTION BY FIRE
ON THE NIGHT OF THE 2ND, 3RD DECEMBER, 1870.

"And thus this man died, leaving his death for an example of a noble courage and a memorial of virtue, not only unto young men, but unto all his nation."

2 MACCABEES VI. 81.

After this, all was over, and the congregation dispersed.

Out into the snow each went his way, the one to his business, the other to his pleasure. The tide of human affairs, for a moment checked by the general emotion, even as a stream is frozen, resumed its course in Tolminster. The shops were reopened, the black flags were hauled down, the bands of music marched off playing lively airs. The sextons soon had the grave of Philip Forester all to themselves.

They bricked up the corner of the vault where the coffin had been shelved, put back the flag-stone over the aperture, and sealed it with mortar. It was the stone on which the bell-ringers usually stood to ring. When they came to chime for even-song they stood on it after their wont, and did so ever afterwards. Nothing was altered in the place except for that tablet of white marble with its black letters, which was to speak to the living generations and to children yet unborn.

Mr. Graham returned to Fairdale after the service, and by-and-by Michael and Isaac Hawthorne followed on the Fairdale road in a

fly, for they were going to see Isaiah Mardles' forge, according to the Quaker's wish. There was really little to see there, but it was natural that the father should desire to gaze upon a spot where so sad a drama in his daughter's life had been enacted. He would not accept Michael's invitation to lunch, for he was anxious to get this pilgrimage over, and then return to London. Besides, had he gone back to Michael's house he must have met Sir Wemyss and Nelly, and he guessed that his presence would be painful to them.

Munching a biscuit as they drove along, the Quaker alluded to the imposing spectacle offered by the funeral; towards Forester he felt no bitterness, but trusted he was at peace everlastingly; and he rehearsed what he should say to Margaret when she should be well enough to learn that her husband was dead, and to ask how he had been buried. As yet the tidings had not been broken to her, and some weeks might elapse before it would be prudent to tell her how she had been widowed.

"But, friend, she will be glad to hear how thou didst read the second lesson," said the Quaker. "Women forgive those who are dead, and when Sybil hath forgiven Forester, she will be touched to hear that he had thy pardon too."

"Tell her that the snow fell and covered his pall, as though the Almighty wished to give a sign that his transgression was blotted out," said Michael.

"Truly the Lord may have meant that, for, lo, the snow has ceased falling now," replied the Quaker.

Yes, the snow had ceased to fall, and the sky had partially cleared, for the wind had veered. The air was soft, as it usually is after snow, and blackbirds and thrushes were hopping about the fields pecking their food in the deep, white covering of the earth. On the hedge-tops, on the boughs of trees which bent under their frosty weight, on the roofs of cottages, and on the thatch of hay-ricks, the snow lay thick, so that the entire country was draped in white, as if an ample shroud had been cast over it. The fly advanced slowly along the roads, though it followed in the track left by Mr. Graham's landau. On the brow of an ascent the forge came in sight, and Michael looked out of the window, expecting to see the glow of the fire and hear the clanging blows on the anvil.

But the forge was deserted. Not only deserted, but seemingly wrecked. The doors had been taken off their hinges, and all the blacksmith's implements had been removed. The hammers, tongs, the bellows, the scores of horseshoes that used to hang on the walls, were gone; instead of them there stood in the middle of the floor

a crane, from whose iron hook hung suspended a square block of stone newly hewn.

Thinking the forge must be under repairs, Michael and the Quaker walked towards the village to make inquiries at the "Chequers Inn." They met the blacksmith coming towards them in his Sunday clothes. Having once seen Isaiah Mardles, Michael knew him, and he remembered Michael, all the more so as he had been at the funeral, and had seen him officiate in the cathedral. He touched his hat. Michael asked the reason for the change in the forge, and he at once gave his explanations. The forge was to be pulled down. By Miss Graham's desire, her father was going to build an asylum for the blind on the adjoining plot of ground, and the place where the forge stood was to be the site of a chapel.

"This is a very sudden resolution, is it not?" asked Michael.

"Ne-ot so sudden, sir," said Mardles, in his curious Eastshire dialect. "Mess Graham had thought on it larng ago, but after Colonel Forester's death the thing was decided. The young leddy is coming deown this afternoon to lay the foundation-stone—quite private. There'll only be the architect, and me, and a mason."

"Do you mean that Miss Graham is coming?"

"Yeus, sir. Did yer want yah hoss shod? I'm afraid ye'll have to go on to Bamley farge, as my new place ain't built yet."

"No; this gentleman has only come to see the forge," answered Michael.

"Ah, sight-seeing," muttered Mardles. "Wull, sir, I'll she-ow yer the place."

The three walked back in silence towards the forge. The fly was drawn up at the door, and the driver, having thrown a rug on his horse's back, was eyeing the building like one who knew it well from having often driven sightseers to it before. The blacksmith led the way in, and stood near the brick furnace with its dry trough and litter of cold ashes.

"Thaar, sir, the-at's where it was done," he said, pointing to the spot immediately under the block of stone.

"Friend, wert thou a witness of what happened?" asked the Quaker, after a moment of steadfast contemplation.

"Ne-o, sir; but my man Bill Scadding was, who's gone away to 'Merikey, and I've he-ard him tell the ste-ory so often that I kne-ow it by heart."

"I pray thee tell it us, friend."

"Whe-ich story shall I tell yer, sir, for Scadding had two?" said the blacksmith, fixing his eyes on the Quaker's with a meaning expression, and at the same time he lowered his voice. "Thaar

was a ste-ory which Scadding told for money to the people who came here, and thaar was t'other which he repeated to hisself at ne-ights when the wind blew and his conscience troubled him."

"And thou knowest that story, friend?"

"Scadding told me half when he was drunk, sir, and God Almighty let me know the rest," answered Mardles, bluntly. "Mr. Christy, sir, yeu who're chaplain of Tolminster Gaol, and who saw that ye-oung woman, Margaret Field, in her trouble, yeu know what I mean. 'The dark things shall be made plain,' and the 'Lord heareth the sorrowful sighing of the prisoner;' ain't those the-ings written in Scripture, where the Lord often told me to look when I was worried in spe-irit and asked Him over my work, 'He-ow laring shall the ungodly flourish?' 'Is My arm shortened?' said the Lord to me t'other marning, and that was the day when Colonel Forester died."

"Friend, trouble not thyself about the dead, whose sins are weighed in balances which are not ours," said the Quaker. "I am Margaret Field's father, and I beg thee tell me the story which thy man Scadding repeated in his moments of disquiet."

"I thought yeu was some kin o' that young 'ooman, sir, for yah lips twitched when yer came in here," said Mardles, respectfully. Saying this, he eyed Isaac Hawthorne all over, mentally rejoicing that he was a Quaker, so far as could be judged from his next words. "Yah child will be comforted in her trials, since she has a father who takes the Lord for his guide. The papers said she had got crazed. And no wonder. Is she better ne-ow?"

"She hath been ill, but is better," answered the Quaker; "and now I would fain hear from thee, friend, that she is innocent of the offence imputed to her."

"She is innocent, sir, God be witness," said Mardles, whispering because of the flyman, "but I'll tell yer the rest by-and-by, for I think them's Mr. Graham's carriage wheels sounding in the road."

The three men walked out of the forge and perceived a landau advancing with a travelling trunk on the roof, and a maid seated beside the footman in the rumble.

"Ah, they're off to furrin' parts," observed the blacksmith. "I did hear that Mr. Graham was going to take his darter to Italy. The poor young thing."

Michael had heard nothing of these arrangements, for he had not seen Rose Graham since the night of Forester's death. He was unaware that the doctors had prescribed a change of climate as absolutely necessary for Rose's health, much doubting, however, whether even this would save her, for the blow which she had

received and strove so valiantly to bear was too much for her strength. The serenity she showed, the smiles which she put on, were for her father's sake, but inwardly she drooped. Her heart in its earthly cage was like a dove that has lost its mate.

The fly made way for the landau, which drove up at the forge door, and Mr. Graham alighted with Mrs. Merrewether. He seemed annoyed at meeting Michael and the Quaker, for he frowned, and Michael, feeling that his presence might be construed into an intrusion, prepared to withdraw without speaking. But this Mr. Graham would not permit. Accidental or not, the meeting afforded him an opportunity of showing his daughter to Isaac Hawthorne, and he took it.

There was a gulf between these two fathers, and on Mr. Graham's side burned a resentment which could not be extinguished. His look as he handed Rose out of the carriage said plainly, "You think your child to be pitied ; look at mine."

The Quaker, who knew not what rancour was, nevertheless reflected : "This is the girl who was my Sybil's rival. She was preferred because she was richer." But this sentiment, which was so human, gave way in a minute to a deep commiseration. Who would not have pitied the blind girl who saw her come on an errand of goodness to this spot, which was full of the darkest memories to her? She pressed her father's arm as she descended from the carriage, and whispered something in his ear evidently to cheer him. But a pink flush spread over her cheeks, and she shivered in the rich furs that enwrapped her. Unseen of her father, a small hand covered with a black glove peeped out from under her cloak, and she raised it to the bandage over her eyes, as if a vision had sprung up which she tried to shut out.

It was the vision of her lost happiness, poor girl !

What though her sightless eyes looked upwards now to the home where she was soon to dwell, she was still of this earth, and must fain cast a longing, lingering look on its past days of joy. Many a summer idyll had they yielded, and hopes without number standing thick as shoots of growing corn. The last time she had come to this forge life had seemed almost too sweet to her young lips slaked with happiness ; and yet no, for she was in love, and love makes for itself so many delicious torments, anxieties, wonders, timid fears, that the felicity it gives cannot cloy.

Six months had barely elapsed since that day, which was to have been the eve of her wedding, when she ambled down the road on horseback in the pride and gaiety of her beauty. She had ridden out to meet Philip ; her horse cast a shoe just outside the park gates,

and she dismounted at the forge. While her groom held the bridle of her horse, and the blacksmith man was doing his work, she stood in the doorway and watched some swallows circling overhead under the limpid blue of heaven. It was the last she was to see of this world, for in another minute angry voices startled her; a frantic woman rushed by, and now she could remember no more of this scene, which loomed back dark and indistinct as a bad dream. No wonder that Rose sighed and that her hand trembled on her father's arm.

Mr. Graham was ill at ease, having come only to humour his daughter's wish, and desiring to get this ceremony quickly finished, he asked impatiently if the architect and mason had not arrived. Mardles went out to halloo down the road, and presently these two functionaries appeared running and breathless. The architect carried a roll of paper, the mason a wooden trough full of mortar with a trowel in it.

Till then Mr. Graham had not told Rose that Michael was present, but he now said, "My darling, Mr. Christy is here." Of Isaac Hawthorne he took no notice beyond making him a cold bow.

"I am so glad you have come, Mr. Christy," said Rose, with a start of pleasure. "Papa told me you officiated in the cathedral this morning, and I thank you with all my heart. We are going away to Italy. The doctors say I am weak and need a change of air. I don't know, for I feel strong, and should have liked to stay in England, though it is cold here." She smiled as her limbs thrilled with a slight shiver, and she drew Michael aside by the hand while Mr. Graham talked with the architect, and the mason made a stir-about of his mortar with the trowel. "I want to tell you about this asylum, Mr. Christy; I should have written to you about it from abroad, for it would please me if you would interest yourself in it. There is to be a school for blind children and a refuge for blind people who are old, and they must be made very home-like. Papa will spare no expense. Here the chapel is to stand, and the institution will have its own chaplain. I wonder who he will be? I was asking myself whether you would ever feel disposed to leave your work in the prison, and if so, whether, for my sake and for Philip's, you would come here? You see, I may perhaps never return to England if the doctors say I am always to live in the sunshine, and so if I knew none of the people in this place I might feel as if I were strange to it, whereas, if you were chaplain, I should be sure that the institution would be managed in the spirit which I desire. There must be no sadness here; blindness is sad enough by itself. If the little ones are taught to

bear their lot with cheerfulness, looking forward to the day when their eyes will see clear in heaven—that is what I should like.”

“Rose, dear, the mason is ready,” said Mr. Graham.

“Yes, papa dear; let me say one word more to Mr. Christy.” She drew Michael further into the recess of the forge and dropped her voice to a whisper; but she was speaking rapidly, as if she feared to falter, and wished to carry through with all she had to say without a display of sensibility. “We may not meet again, Mr. Christy, so I wish you to remember how entirely I forgive that poor woman who—who hurt me. Will you tell her that from me if you see her again? I am quite sure she did not do it on purpose. There is to be no prosecution: papa has written to his solicitors about it, and if you can I should like you to make Margaret Field feel not only that I forgive her, but that she did me no such injury as people might think who do not know how I reason about this blindness. It is a trial, of course, but God cannot have sent it me for nothing. And now I think that is all I have to say. I am going to lay this foundation-stone. I have chosen the day of Philip’s funeral, because I wish the building to be associated with all I loved best. See this glass tube which I have brought in my pocket to lay in the stone: there are a number of new coins in it, and my betrothal ring which Philip gave me, and which I had put there for good luck. Only, don’t tell papa: he would think me superstitious.”

She laid a finger on her lips with an arch smile, and turned away, guided by her father’s hand. To Michael it was as if an angel had ceased speaking. Isaac Hawthorne, who was standing at the further end of the forge, and who had heard all Rose’s words with an unspeakable emotion, wiped his eyes, and watched her movements with a beaming glance.

She was standing close to the big stone now, with the trowel in one hand and the glass tube in the other. Behind her, in the roadway, the snow formed a white background. The flyman, the footman from Fairdale, the maid, without approaching too near, eyed the scene with a respectful curiosity.

“You’ll have to lay the tube in the slit, please, miss,” said the mason, lifting his trough within reach of her hand, so that she might take out some mortar. Rose slipped the trowel in the trough.

“Papa, please direct one of my hands, and you the other, Mr. Christy,” said she. She had removed her gloves, and her small wrists yielded themselves to the guidance of her father and the chaplain. Mrs. Merrewether and the maid came forward to hold back the folds of her cloak so that they might not embarrass her arms.

"There, miss, that's it; the tube is in the right place," said the mason.

"Now for the mortar," added the architect.

"How heavy the trowel feels now," exclaimed Rose, smiling, but serious. "Am I going right, Mr. Christy?"

"One more lump o' the mortar, and it 'ull be done, miss," the mason said.

Rose's lips murmured inaudibly as, with Michael's assistance, she patted the trowel softly on the mortar which was to conceal the tube in which her betrothal ring lay. She was asking for a blessing on this institution about to be founded. The architect turned the windlass of the crane, and the stone descended to its place on a small square of brick foundation which had been prepared at a few days' notice to receive it. Thus the simple ceremony ended.

In a few moments more Rose was gone.

She went without knowing that Margaret Field's father had been standing close to her; but her last word of farewell to Michael was "Remember," which he accepted as a second seal, so to say, to the forgiveness which the blind girl bequeathed to the woman whom he desired to woo as his wife. Truly a bequest, for, standing in the road to watch the landau as it disappeared in the direction of Tolminster, he had a presentiment that he should not see this gentle and gifted child of God again. "What will she say if she hears I am married to Margaret?" he mused, and straightway fell to wishing that he had had time to throw out a hint of his love, that he might have obtained Rose's good-will for it.

He forgot at that moment that he could not have thrown out this hint without explaining that Margaret was not married. Rose believed her to be the wife of Captain Field, who had bailed her out of prison. Oddly enough, this obstacle of Margaret's supposititious husband had not occurred either to Michael or to Isaac Hawthorne. It broke very suddenly upon the chaplain that, before he could wed Margaret, he should have to prove that she was not married, that the man who had passed as her husband was an impostor, and so forth.

O, what intricacies and snares in these meshes of deceit!

Michael was roused from his reverie by hearing the Quaker and Isaiah Mardles conversing in low voices behind him. The architect and the mason had retired at the same time as Mr. Graham, and there was no one at the forge besides these three men. Michael waited for a little space longer in the road, so as not to disturb the confidences which the Quaker was soliciting in his wistful longing for proofs to substantiate his daughter's innocence.

"Friend, I may depart in peace then," he said, rising at length from the stone on which he had been sitting. "Thou assurest me that the blow was struck in accident?"

"Yas! A never doubted it; of course 'twere an accident," replied Mardles.

"Thank Heaven for it; for after what I have seen of this poor blind maiden, I should have been in sore woe had it been otherwise."

"Be yer easy, sir," answered the blacksmith: "but all the same,"—and he shook his head,—"*its* her death-blow the poor young leddy's got. Ded yer mark how she she-ivered? In these parts we call tha-at the breath o'death—and ah, it's a cold, clammy breath for the young to feel!"

CHAPTER LX.

TOLMINSTER ASSIZE.

A MONTH after these events Tolminster was preparing for the periodical excitement of a winter assize.

The town liked its assizes, for they brought a few days' gaiety (to those who were not prisoners)—circuit dinners at the "Crown," fine speeches in court, and plenty of horrors to furnish forth local gossip. The state carriages and javelin men of the high sheriff were always a sight in themselves, and the town held to some ancient customs in receiving the judges, to whom the mayor was wont to present a golden carolus apiece as "dagger money." This was a relic of days when the country was infested with highwaymen, and when the judges were exposed to encountering adventures on their travels.

It was also a custom in Tolminster that a ball should be held during the assizes; the corporation, the garrison, and the circuit mess combining to share the expenses. This merry habit was not to be departed from on the occasion of the present assize, at which Margaret Field was to take her trial.

Margaret's case was first on the calendar. All Tolminster was talking about it, and knew that, the prosecutors having withdrawn, there would only be a formal arraignment and acquittal. These things had been announced in the local papers. But Rose Graham's name had become so sweet in the mouths of the Eastshire folks that it was feared some public demonstration would be made against

the aggressor. The authorities communicated with the prisoner's solicitor (Mr. Pulman) to inquire at what hour she would arrive in Tolminster, in order that they might take measures for having the railway station and the approaches to the court guarded by a strong body of police.

Such symptoms of the public ill-will gave great pain to Michael Christy, who was powerless to cope with them. It was the general opinion that Mr. Graham had withdrawn from the prosecution as a pure act of grace, and because his daughter was too unwell to bear the agitation of appearing in the witness-box. Margaret's madness, which had been believed in at one time, was scouted now that accounts were spread of her being quite lucid, inasmuch that her insanity was alleged to be only a paltry pretence. Irrationally enough, the people who said this were the same who contended that Margaret could have had no motive for attacking Miss Graham and accusing Forester. But prejudiced crowds do not argue. Philip Forester was a hero and dead, and scandal durst not touch him. If the whole truth about his relations with Margaret had been published, many would have rejected the proofs with incredulity; and the rest would have said that Margaret was none the less to blame.

Margaret was unpopular, and that was enough. Other women in her situation, who have taken the law into their own hands, and executed savage vengeance upon betrayers or rivals of their own sex, have been enthusiastically acclaimed by the people; but somehow all the circumstances of Margaret's unwitting offence had turned against her, while the sentimental, romantic elements of the case encompassed her persecutors and Rose, who was on their side.

Michael Christy, whose lips were perforce sealed, soon gave up trying to defend Margaret with such few weapons of argument as he might use with safety. He kept silent, and only cherished Margaret the more for all that others said against her.

One or two events of importance had occurred during the month after the Grahams had left England. Frank Christy had resigned his commission in the Dragoons, and though his resignation had not yet been accepted, so that he continued to perform his regimental duties, the step which he had taken at his uncle's dictation was irrevocable. Sir Wemyss would not hear of any compromise on the point, saying, that as a preface to any forgiveness which he might be disposed to grant, Frank must cease to wear the Queen's uniform, which he had disgraced. After that the Baronet would see what was to be done towards giving the scapegrace a new start in life. Frank himself talked gloomily of going to join the Carlisle, who were then warring in Spain. A soldier always seems to think that he can rehabilitate

himself by spilling blood in any cause, whether good or bad. Frank did not even know what the Carlists were fighting about.

Michael, on his side, had given a three months' notice of his resignation of the gaol chaplaincy. Meanwhile, the period before the assizes brought him a great press of work, for he had to impart advice of fortitude and repentance to the prisoners who were to be tried, and some of whom had long sentences of penal servitude in store. Among the lot was a poor wretch named Josiah Roove, charged with murder in a poaching affray; and it was suggestive of the infinite ramifications of crime that Philip Forester—guilty of so many things—had been, in a manner, indirectly responsible for Roove's offence also. Roove had been the friend, or mate as he called it, of Bill Scadding, the blacksmith. When Forester began to pay Scadding hush-money the latter led Roove into habits of boozing. Till then Roove had been a poacher, and a pretty disreputable character, but he was not violent. On the night when he killed the gamekeeper his mate had treated him to some fiery draughts of corn-brandy, to which he was unaccustomed, and which set his blood aflame. So he kept on repeating sorrowfully to Michael, "Scadding didn't ought to have given me the brandy, sir." And when he heard that Scadding had gone to America, he thought his mate had left him in the lurch for fear of being implicated in his crime, and he called this "shabby." Michael was much interested in this unhappy man, whose conviction was inevitable.

Working in the prison with all his will, he yet found time to write frequently to the Hawthornes, and once or twice a week he went up to London. But he was not allowed to see Margaret. She was growing better every day, and a fortnight after the turn in her illness she was well enough to sit for a few hours every afternoon in one of the sitting-rooms at "Chupps' Hotel," but she expressed a constant disinclination either to see Michael or to hear him spoken of. The Quaker, who never stooped to evasions, told the chaplain this plainly and rather dolefully. Mrs. Hawthorne and Violet, with womanly tact, attributed Margaret's behaviour to weakness, and encouraged Michael to hope that she would grow more sociable as she became stronger.

They ended by advising him not to seek an interview until the assizes, when he would see Margaret in the natural course of things without the appearance of seeking to force his presence on her. Meantime, the news of Philip Forester's death was gently broken to her by her mother one day when she was composed, and had put some questions as to things that had occurred during her illness.

How she bore the news will be best explained in a letter which Mrs. Hawthorne sent to Michael.

"I was sitting near Sybil and holding her hands in mine," she wrote, "when she asked me shyly whether Colonel Forester's marriage with Miss Graham had taken place while she lay unconscious. I had noticed that she was preoccupied, but she spoke with so much calm that I thought I could venture to tell her the sad secret. I was surprised to see how quietly she listened. She did not even look at me, but stroked my hands listlessly as if I were relating a story that concerned somebody else. By and by she propped herself on her pillow and remarked tranquilly, 'Mamma, I shall wear widow's mourning. I was his wife, and if he had married Miss Graham nothing would have stopped me from getting the marriage annulled, even if I had to bear as much again as I have endured already.' Her eyes sparkled as she said this, poor child, and I perceived by the depth of her resentment what love she might have felt for that unhappy man had he been true to her. By and by she turned on her pillow and cried. I wish I could convey to you, dear friend, how anxiously I watched the outpouring of her grief, for it would pain me above measure could I think that Sybil retained any lasting affection for the husband who abandoned her so cruelly. If this were the case I would tell you frankly, deeming it best that you should cherish no hopes that might be disappointed. But from what I see, the love which our dear child once gave (if it was love, and not a mere girl's caprice) was uprooted long ago, leaving only a passionate animosity behind, and her wounded heart now pines for such a refuge as your generous affection would give. Let me add that you have a warm ally in that strange but devoted girl, Barbara Haggit, who never misses an occasion of speaking about you and saying something in your favour. It is unaccountable how a girl whose principles appear to be so very, very lax (for she is certainly what some would call a bad girl) can exhibit so much cordial kindness. And I have discovered that although Sybil shuns speaking about you when her father and I are present, she does not mind hearing Barbara talking about you. Can it be—I broach this idea with diffidence—that her reluctance to let me remind her of your many good offices has arisen hitherto from the belief that her husband was still alive, and under these circumstances she feared to be drawn into a friendship which she apprehended might ripen into a warmer feeling towards you? I, as Sybil's mother, am so sensible of the happy lot that might await her as your wife, that I write, as you see, without any

reserve in my conjectures. But you will not misinterpret the sentiment which dictates my words. Let us hope that now Sybil is freed from that miserable chain of the past, and has her heart to give once again, she will not be long in bestowing it on one so worthy as yourself.

"I am not so worthy as all that, but I would endeavour to make her happy, Heaven knows," muttered Michael, as he folded Mrs. Hawthorne's letter, and he lived on the hope expressed in it until the day of the assizes.

His duties on that day obliged him to go down to the court early, so as to be in attendance when the van arrived with the prisoners. He could not, therefore, repair to the station to meet Margaret. All the prisoners had a claim on him, and were most disposed to urge it in the supreme hour of their misery, for, shut up in narrow cells under the court, having no books to read and nothing to do during weary hours while waiting for their names to be called, they were liable to become a prey to despondency and evil thoughts. Michael was anxious that none of his prisoners should go into the dock terrified or defiant, for, as few of them would have counsel to defend them, the severity of their sentences would depend much on the attitudes they assumed. In particular he tried to keep up the spirits of wretched Joss Roove.

One can scarcely form an idea of what miserable places those court-cells are; they were but a third of the size of those in the gaol, and iron gates closed them instead of doors, so that Michael as he walked down the passage could fancy himself in a menagerie full of cages for wild beasts. Above him in the street he heard the roar of a multitude waiting for the judges to arrive in the sheriff's state carriages.

It happened that this opening day of the assize was one of slush and rain, causing the pageant to miss its usual effect.

The judges in their sergeants' robes of scarlet and their freshly-powdered wigs, the mayor with his furred gown and gold chain, the sheriff with his red uniform and cocked hat, were to all intents invisible. The crowds who tried to obtain a glimpse of them through the bespattered carriage could not. But this rain was favourable to Margaret, who had alighted with her father, Dr. Tabor, and Mr. Pulman at the station before Tolminster, and who drove through the town in a fly unnoticed by the populace, who would have hooted her had they guessed she was there. It was two o'clock in the afternoon when she arrived, and by that time the judges had already settled down to their work. The police introduced her into

the solicitor's room, where there was a good fire, and told her she would not have long to wait.

An assize begins with a procession of the judges to Divine service, after which they repair to the court-house, where the proclamation of gaol delivery is made, and then the grand jury are charged. Generally there is no time for anything more than this on the first day, and so business is adjourned till the morrow; but Her Majesty's judges having reached Tolminster at eleven o'clock in the morning, were enabled to conclude their preliminaries within a couple of hours, and the grand jury having begun to return their presentments with despatch, the trial of prisoners in the Crown Court commenced soon after two.

A warder apprised Michael that Mr. Justice Ogle had taken his seat on the bench, and the chaplain went up into the court just as an usher with a wand was calling aloud the name of "Margaret Field." A policeman assisted him to make his way to the vicinity of the dock, and he stood there thinking Margaret would pass by him; but she suddenly appeared through a trap-door in the floor of the dock, having been led round by the usual way of prisoners. Mrs. Baillie stood beside her. For the nonce Margaret was a prisoner again, and Michael could not even show her that he was at hand, for she stood a little in front of him close to the dock rail.

He back being thus turned to him, all he could see was that she was dressed in deep mourning, and stood with her head bowed, ashamed but not trembling. To the formal question put her by the clerk of arraigns she answered in a low but distinct voice, "Not Guilty."

There had been a muffled explosion of murmurs in the court when Margaret entered, but curiosity rather than the cries of the usher, who entreated "Silence," speedily restored quiet. The judge was enthroned under a dark oak canopy emblazoned with the royal arms. At his right sat the sheriff, and on the other seats about the bench ladies abounded, armed with opera-glasses, who stared at the accused with all their eyes. The crowd in the other parts of the court was thick and eager. Amid the sombre tunics of the police, the wigs of the barristers, and the scarlet facings on the blue coats of the javelin men, a concourse of unwashed faces and fustian coats could be seen, blocking up all the avenues through which people who had business passed in and out of the court, struggling.

Mr. Graham's solicitor, who appeared for the prosecution, had risen from his seat at the solicitor's table and commenced a statement of his client's reasons for desiring to abandon the prosecution. From circumstances which had come to Mr. Graham's knowledge,

there was no doubt that the lamentable assault on Miss Graham was the result of an accident. He, the solicitor, would not pause to inquire whether the prisoner at the bar was in her right mind at the time of the occurrence; his instructions were simply to say that the prosecution had no evidence to offer.

Mr. Justice Ogle, who was a wise-looking little man, listened to this with a grave air, folding his hands, which were covered with black gloves. The whole affair had been explained to him beforehand in his private room, and a letter from Mr. Graham had been delivered to him. He knew that there were mysteries under all this which had best not be probed, and he was not going to make any objections.

"Well," he said, when the solicitor had finished. "I am informed that Mr. Graham has been obliged to go abroad for the sake of his daughter's health. He was bound over to prosecute, and so was Miss Graham, but as there are exceptional circumstances in this case I shall not impose a fine."

"It is not from any want of respect towards your ludship that Mr. Graham has not appeared here in person to-day," said the solicitor.

"That I know," answered Mr. Justice Ogle, who truly looked as if he would have made it a bad business for any one who had failed in respect to him. "Well, it comes to this, that as no witnesses are forthcoming the prisoner must be discharged. Gentlemen of the jury, I must instruct you to return a verdict of acquittal in this case."

Then Mr. Pulman rose. "I wish it to be recorded, my lud, that my client leaves this court without any stain on her character. Your ludship has only to look at this lady's face to see that she is not a person who would commit a savage act. She is heartily sorry for what happened, and has suffered in many terrible ways for what was only an accident."

"Your client certainly does not look like a savage person," avowed the judge; "but I trust this will be a lesson to her."

This his lordship said because judges must needs say something wise in the way of a homily. But he added nothing more, and the jury returned their verdict of "Not Guilty." So ended the case of Margaret Field, so far as earthly tribunals were concerned, and the prisoner was restored to freedom.

A side door in the dock was opened for her by a warder and she walked out into her father's arms. There was such a dignity in her mien, and her pale face with its large eyes looked so mild and childlike as it was raised to receive her father's kiss, that the crowd

were moved to pity, and fell back on both sides to let her pass. There was no rude word spoken. She threaded her way out of the court leaning on the Quaker's arm, and it was not until she issued into the open air that she turned and saw Michael Christy at her elbow. They were in a lonely yard, and it was not a picturesque place for an interview between lovers. The prisoners' van was drawn up in the corner, and a pair of turnkeys hung about an iron-nailed door which led to the cells.

But what mattered the place? To Michael it was a paradise. He saw Margaret blush deep, and felt her small hand tremble in his. He had never seen her so well dressed, nor found her so lovely as now in her black attire, and crape bonnet with its tiny widow's cap.

"Oh, Mrs. Forester, I am so glad," was all he could say. "The sorrows must all end now."

"God hear thee, friend," said the Quaker. "Sybil, my love, Michael Christy hath cared for thee like a brother."

"I am going to live with my parents now, Mr. Christy," said Margaret, gently. "I have much to atone for, as you know."

"Shall you be living at Crossbridge?" asked Michael.

"Yes, at Ivy House."

"It is not far from Tolminster."

"No, only half-an-hour by rail."

"I will go and see you there, if you will let me."

"I shall always be glad to see you, Mr. Christy."

She lowered her glance a moment, but suddenly looked up into his eyes with an impulse of gratitude. "Let me thank you for your goodness to me whilst I was in prison. Be as good to all other prisoners as you were to me, and do not let it discourage you if some treat you as badly as I did. Good-bye, for to-day."

"For to-day," he echoed.

"Yes," she said, with the faintest falter, "since we are to meet again. I am going to the cathedral now to see my husband's grave."

"Sybil will carry him the forgiveness we have all given," said the Quaker.

"God go with you," rejoined Michael, who detected in Margaret's wifely act no motive for jealousy.

Then their hands met again; and with a glad heart Michael walked back to his work in the prison.

CHAPTER LXI.

CONCLUSION.

DICKY BOOL, once lieutenant but now captain in the 12th Dragoons, was knocking the balls about in the billiard-room of the mess, some two months after the foregoing events, and as he played he sang from a composition of his own :—

"If my hair were flaming red
Would I paint it? No, not I!
What wise man would trust his head
To the hazard of a dye?"

"You are thinking of the painting Frank Christy gave you," laughed Colonel Buckman.

"I gave him as good, sir," responded Dicky.

"Poor Frank; I'm glad he's married that little cousin of his, but it's a crying shame she should have made him cut the service," remarked Lord Harry Gayleard. "She might just as well have left him amongst us."

"I don't want any married men in my regiment," grumbled the Colonel. "There are always rows where there are petticoats. Why Dicky there was already in love with Miss Christy, and we should have had fine goings on amongst the three."

"No, Colonel, I assure you," protested Dick.

"Don't deny it, Dick," chorused several of his comrades. "Remember the verses we fished out of your pocket."

"I bet we'd find some more there if we looked," cried Gayleard. "Dick has turned out quite a poetical talent."

"No, that's bosh," said Dick, who stooped to play a hazard; but this posture, leaving his hind pockets unprotected, gave opportunity to the enterprise of a friend, who with nimble fingers extracted a sheet of pink paper, which he flourished in triumph.

"Give that up," exclaimed Dick, indignant.

"No, no; read," chorused the officers; and the little captain being held back by the stronger arms of his comrades, the purloiner read, amid the general exhilaration :—

"TO NELLY C—.

"The dream is o'er, and we must part;
The sunshine of my life is flown;
Your pride has wrecked as leal a heart
As ever beat for you alone.

"Farewell, my life ; and strive to be
At least to others kind and true ;
Your memory still is blest to me,
Though I henceforth am nought to you."

"A man must be badly hit to write such stuff as that," guffawed the Colonel.

"I am not hit at all," vowed Dick, red as a cock's crest ; but this statement was received with such derision that he ended by laughing too. "At all events," said he, "I'm glad that affair came to nothing, for I wouldn't be a married man among you fellows for untold gold or coppers."

"I've never written a verse in my life," observed one of the officers, as he cannoned. "If love develops lurking talents I wish I could try the complaint and make it serve to improve my play at billiards."

"Love does queer things, but it generally cracks a fellow's head," remarked Gayleard. "Talking of that, have you heard that rumour that Frank's brother, the parson, is to marry Margaret Field?"

"Oh, that's an old story. I believe they were engaged when she was already in the prison, and nothing stopped them but that obstacle about a Scotch marriage with Forester, you know," ejaculated Captain Jarnes, nicknamed Buttery.

"If there's scandal abroad Buttery is sure to know of it," exclaimed Dicky Bool.

"Oh, this isn't scandal," replied Jarnes. "It's quite a pretty story. Mike Christy is to become chaplain to the blind asylum which is building at Fairdale, and his wife will expiate that little mistake of hers in blinding Miss Graham by acting kindly towards blind children for ever afterwards. It's a good notion, derived from the fifth act of a melodrama."

The officers stood around leaning on their cues and listening.

"I don't see why the thing shouldn't be done," said Dicky Bool, sturdily

"I thought Margaret Field was married?" observed the Colonel.

"Oh, her husband has died off conveniently," said Jarnes with a sneer.

"And who is to be the new gaol chaplain?"

"I believe Mike Christy has recommended a fellow called Vigus, who has a dog, and is the friend of all dogs ; but as he is a bachelor the justices won't hear of it, having had enough of that sort with Michael. However, Vigus has been acting as assistant-chaplain at the gaol these last few weeks, and they say that Mrs. Baillie, the

matron, has hooked him, so that he will be able to qualify as a married man by the time he sends in his testimonials."

"That prison appears to be a marrying-shop," remarked a gay lieutenant.

"We'll send Dick there," said another.

"Oh, it's all Buttery's invention," chimed in a third.

Lord Harry Gayleard interposed by expressing his doubts as to the story of Michael and Margaret. "These Christys are of excellent family," he said, "and one of them, especially a parson, wouldn't commit a blunder of that sort."

"I don't know," observed Dicky Bool, chalking the button of his cue. "The other day when I was with the hounds I got thrown out and rode through Crossbridge alone. I met Michael Christy and this Mrs. Field walking down a lane together with a couple of children running in front of them. I know it was her, for I saw her face in court."

"Were those her children?" inquired Captain Jarnes.

"I didn't ask her," responded Bool.

"H'm, then there seems to be some fire to Buttery's smoke," remarked Lord Harry Gayleard; evidently astonished.

His lordship was not the only person astonished, for although at the time when this conversation was being held in the Dragoons' mess-room, Michael believed that his assiduities in visiting Ivy House were unnoticed, they had become a matter of general talk. Michael might now be seen at Crossbridge almost every day. Two months had elapsed since the assizes, and the chaplain had had time to win the confidence of Philip Forester's widow.

Maybe he had won her love too. For at the very hour when their names were being bandied about in jest they were taking one of their afternoon strolls together in bright spring weather. The two children who ran by their side were Violet Tabor's. They were in the garden of Ivy House, and Mrs. Hawthorne and Violet were seated at the open drawing-room window and watching them. As for the Quaker, he strolled about among the gravel paths, looking to see how the blossoms were faring in the sunlight. Lilac and laburnum, chestnuts, apple-trees were all in bloom, and the lawn was littered with the mauve flowers of the westeria and the pink ones of the quince.

Margaret and Michael sat down to rest under an oak. They were talking about Barbara Haggit.

"I asked her to remain in my service," said Margaret; "but she refused. I was very sorry. She preferred her independent life."

"Poor girl. What looks like independence often means a worse slavery than the one from which we fly," said Michael.

"Yes, I found out that to my cost," answered Margaret, with a sigh. "But oh, how good my father and mother have been to me, Mr. Christy, and Violet too! Why did I not take the advice you gave me in the gaol?"

"I did not mean to recall those painful memories," said Michael, gently.

"Oh, it is good that they should be recalled, the oftener the better."

"Not if they sadden you."

"They do not. I am happy now, and feel somehow that I never should have been so happy if things had befallen otherwise. It is only the thought of Miss Graham that disturbs me, poor girl. I shall think of her all my life long, wherever I may be."

"Wherever, Margaret?" This was the first time Michael had called her Margaret, and she reddened deep. "Have you thought at all of where your life will be spent? Where would you like to spend it? Would you mind spending it with me?"

"Oh, what a poor wife I should be to you," Margaret answered, all trembling, as her eyes filled, "and what would the world say?"

"The world would say that I loved you with all my heart, dearest," Michael answered, bending over her; "and so I do."

"Friend," said Isaac Hawthorne, coming forward from out of a lilac clump, "the first swallows have just passed overhead. It is a fine spring and giveth promise of a glad year."

THE END.

NOVELS AT ONE SHILLING.

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 Midshipman Easy.
 Rattlin the Reef.
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 Newton Forster.
 Jacob Faithful.
 The Dog Fiend.
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